The Art of AFRICA

A *Resource for Educators*

Christa Clarke

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

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Map by Anandaroop Roy

B*inder, front*: image 5, Male and Female Antelope Headdresses (C*i wara kun*).
B*ack*: image 38, Textile Mantle (detail).

B*ox, front*: image 21, Pendant Mask. B*ack*: image 38, Textile Mantle (detail).
S*pine*: image 9, Lidded Saltcellar

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Foreword

The Metropolitan Museum of Art celebrates artistic creativity from across the globe and from all times. Thus, our distinguished collection of African Art has special significance both because of its aesthetic excellence and because our strong collections in all artistic traditions complement one another so profoundly. We therefore take the greatest pleasure in putting forward this publication, *The Art of Africa: A Resource for Educators*. Christa Clark, Curator of Africa, the Americas, and the Pacific at the Newark Museum, Alisa LaGamma, Curator of African Art at the Metropolitan Museum, and the Museum's Education staff have worked together to select and shape the content to be especially useful to teachers and students.

We also thank with special gratitude Mr. and Mrs. Marvin H. Schein for making this effort possible. We know that the educational value of this material will be realized in classrooms throughout New York and across the world for many years to come.

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Overview of the Collection

The African art collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art is celebrated as one of the most important housed in an art museum. Its history begins in the 1940s when Nelson Rockefeller undertook the project of amassing an extensive collection of African, Oceanic, and Precolumbian art. At the time, Rockefeller was president of the Museum of Modern Art and his interest in these fields derived from their historic influence on the Western avant-garde. MoMA's sponsorship of a series of landmark exhibitions of non-Western art beginning in 1935 and Rockefeller's close friendship with its director, René d'Harnoncourt, ultimately led to Rockefeller's founding in 1954 of the Museum of Primitive Art, a pioneering private institution located across the street from MoMA. Art historian Robert Goldwater served as the MPA's director, advising Rockefeller on acquisitions and developing an influential exhibition program. In 1969 Rockefeller signed an agreement transferring the MPA to The Metropolitan Museum of Art to be housed within a new wing. Included in this gift were 3,300 works of art, a specialized library, and a photographic archive. Named for Nelson Rockefeller's son, who collected many of the Asmat works from Irian Jaya, western New Guinea, The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing was opened to the public in 1978. This addition made an essential contribution to the encyclopedic nature of the Metropolitan's collections. Since that time, the collection has continued to grow through acquisitions and gifts to include more than 11,000 works from Africa, the Pacific Islands, and North, Central, and South America. Two major additions to the African component of the Metropolitan's collection, each comprising more than 100 works, are a series of Dogon objects from Mali given by Lester Wunderman between 1978 and 1987 and a collection of artworks from the court of Benin in Nigeria given by Klaus Perls in 1991. From its beginnings, the Metropolitan's African collection was conceived as a fine arts collection focused on artistic traditions from Africa south of the Sahara. While it originally emphasized sculptural traditions from western and central Africa, over the last several decades the collection has come to embrace expressive traditions in other media such as textiles as well as those of eastern and southern Africa.

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Contents

Goals and Design of this Resource

Works of art communicate vital and important aspects of the cultures in which they were created. By studying art from Africa, students come to understand the central role it plays in the customs, belief systems, social organizations, and political systems of African societies. This publication presents African art and culture through a focus on primarily traditional sculpture, textiles, metalwork, and ceramics in the African art collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Educators and their students can study these works of art solely in the classroom or, ideally, in preparation for a visit to the Metropolitan or to their local museum.

In these pages, we provide background information for educators about African culture and history as well as detailed information about selected works of art. Teachers may adapt the content to the interests, skills, and abilities of their students and may use suggested interdisciplinary connections to social studies, language arts, and studio arts curricula.

This resource is organized so that a teacher can incorporate study of the artworks into a single lesson, a series of lessons, or an entire unit of study. It begins with a **map** and an **introduction to Africa**: the continent's geography, peoples and cultures, and history. The next section discusses **the role of visual expression in Africa**, covering important topics such as aesthetics and styles, the roles of artists and patrons, and materials and techniques. **Forty works of art** in the Museum's collection are described in detail, accompanied by suggested discussion questions to encourage students to look closely at, analyze, and interpret the art.

The **classroom applications section** includes lesson plans based on thematic groupings of the artworks and activities that will help the teacher create a focused unit of study around some of the key concepts associated with African art. **Comparisons for classroom discussion** present selected pairs of artworks with questions, offering an opportunity for further discussion that will help students discern the distinctive features of each work. (These pairs are also available on the enclosed CD for projection in the classroom.)

A **glossary** provides definitions of words that are bolded on first mention in the text. A **pronunciation guide** offers approximate pronunciations for selected African words and names mentioned in this resource. An **introduction to the video** provides background information that will be useful prior to viewing footage of performers dancing headdresses similar to some of those included in this publication. The **selected resources section** contains bibliographies, online resources (the Museum's *Timeline of Art History* is particularly useful), and a videography. These will be helpful in gathering the additional information teachers may need to make an exploration of African art stimulating and relevant to their curriculum.

Goals for Students

To become familiar with the variety of visual expression in the traditional art of sub-Saharan Africa.

To understand how African artists use abstraction, idealization, and expressive exaggeration.

To understand that African art plays a central role in:

- Mediating between the world of the living and the spirit world
- Expressing community ideals
- Defining power and leadership
- Protecting and healing
- Celebrating and commemorating cycles of life, both human and agricultural

To become comfortable talking about art. As students describe what they see and share interpretations about the meanings of works of art, they will develop language and critical thinking skills.

Map
Introduction to African Art

Africa

Modern political map of the continent showing peoples mentioned in this resource

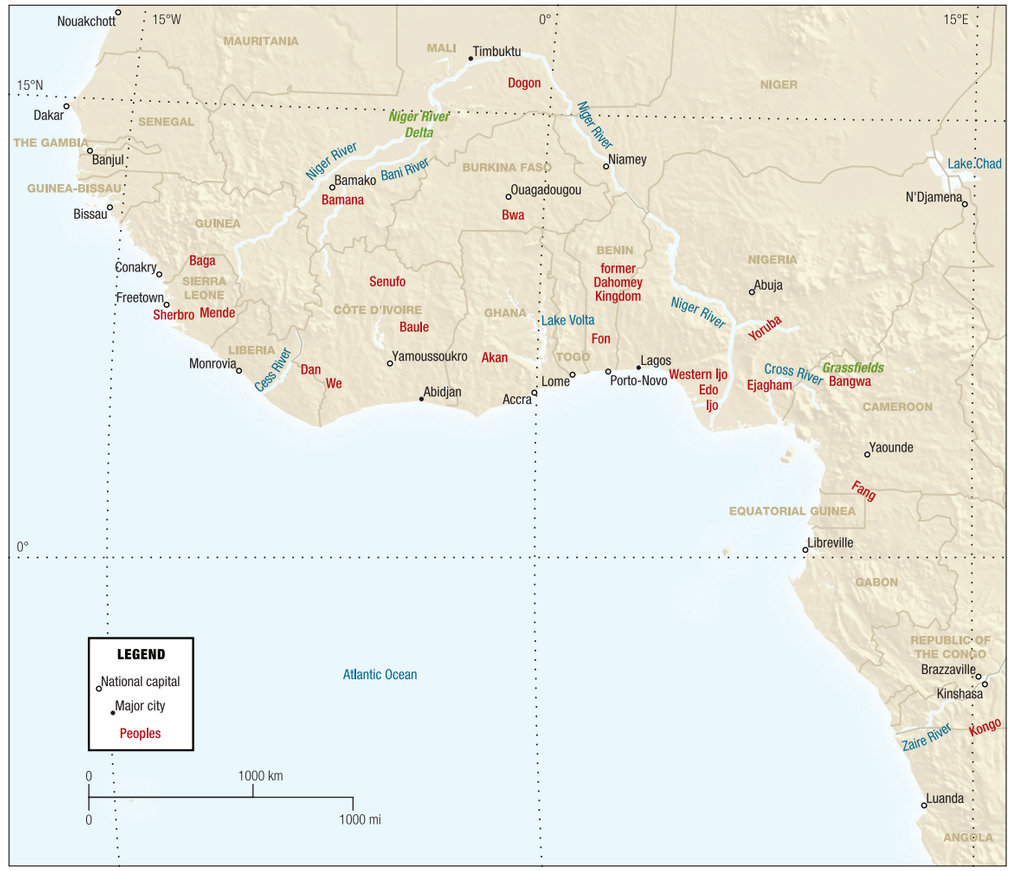


Image 5

Introduction to Africa

Today, Africa is considered to be the cradle of human ancestry, from which we may all trace our descent. Based on the evidence to date, most scientists concur that humankind evolved and modern humans emerged on the African continent. Recent discoveries of cultural **artifact**s dating back 70,000 years also suggest that the earliest forms of visual expression may be found in Africa. For many thousands of years, Africans have contributed to the cultural heritage of the world, creating masterful works of astonishing innovation and creativity. Africa's rich artistic legacy is the subject of this publication, which is based on the superb African art collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Metropolitan's Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas historically has focused on the fine arts traditions of sub-Saharan Africa. The majority of works in the collection relate to historical traditions from western and central Africa, regions with the highest concentration of **figurative** sculpture. In recent years, the scope of the collection has expanded to embrace works from eastern and southern Africa. Artworks from the African continent are represented in other collections within the Metropolitan, most notably the Department of Egyptian Art, but also the Islamic Art, Contemporary Art, and Photographs departments. The ancient arts of Egypt are not included in this resource because they are the subject of another Metropolitan resource for educators. Finally, while there have been important developments in modern and contemporary African art since the mid-twentieth century, this publication focuses on tradition-based genres of African art.

Geography

Africa is the second largest continent, after Asia, in terms of both size and population. Contemporary Africa is comprised of fifty-four different nations, whose borders reflect the legacy of the continent's division under colonialism. Africa is further characterized and defined by great geographic and ecological diversity. To the north and south are large deserts, while on the western coast, a broad swath of rainforest straddles either side of the equator. The majority of the continent, however, consists of savannah grasslands. The three great rivers that run through different parts of the continent—the Nile, the Niger, and the Zaire—have always been important means of contact and exchange within Africa. Overseas communication and trade, however, were limited historically due to a scarcity of safe harbors along Africa's relatively smooth coastline and the difficulties of travel in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

The Sahara, the world's largest desert, has long served as a natural division between the northern part of the continent and the lands lying below. Once fertile land, the Sahara region suffered from severe drought and became a desert

sometime around 2000 B.C. As a result, northern Africa had greater contact with the Mediterranean world than sub-Saharan Africa and was also introduced earlier to Christianity and Islam. The traditions of northern Africa have therefore been regarded as distinct from those of sub-Saharan Africa and historically excluded from discussions of African art. Scholars today, however, recognize that sub-Saharan Africa was not as isolated as once widely thought and that trans-Saharan trade, from at least the fifth century onward, ensured continuous cultural interaction and exchange.

Peoples and Cultures

Today, over 680 million people live in Africa. Although some regions remain sparsely inhabited, others are densely populated. The West African nation of Nigeria, for example, has one-fifth of the entire continent's population. About a third of all Africans live in large cities such as Lagos (Nigeria), the continent's most populous city with 13.5 million people. Other major urban centers in contemporary Africa include Cairo (Egypt), Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo), Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Dakar (Senegal), and Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Pretoria (South Africa). The majority of Africans, however, live in more rural areas where their lifestyle centers on agricultural activities.

Image 23

In those parts of the continent that are not heavily urbanized, Africa's geography and climate have especially impacted the development of different artistic traditions. In agricultural communities, seasonal patterns of rainfall and drought affect cultivation and, by extension, their cultural practices. An alternation between rainy and dry seasons is seen throughout much of Africa, in varying degrees. Dry seasons allow opportunities for part-time artisans to create artifacts and for people to organize festivals and other large-scale social events that employ such art forms. Certain areas, such as southwestern Africa and parts of eastern Africa's interior, also had (and continue to have) frequent droughts. This has forced populations to migrate often or adopt a nomadic lifestyle. As a result, their artistic expression has focused on relatively ephemeral and personal traditions such as body ornamentation, rather than larger scale wooden sculpture.

Throughout the continent, there is found a diversity of societies, languages, and **culture**s. It is estimated that there are well over 1,000 distinct languages in Africa, making it the most linguistically varied of all the continents. In Nigeria alone, more than 250 different languages are spoken. Important regional languages, spoken over broad geographic areas by people of varied ethnicity, include Arabic in northern Africa, Swahili in eastern Africa, and Hausa and Mandinka in parts of western Africa. English, French, and Portuguese were introduced during the colonial period and remain in wide usage today.

Culturally, Africans define themselves in many different ways: by occupational caste, village, kinship group, regional origin, and nationality. "Peoples" or "cultures" are the preferred terms when referring to ethnic identities; "tribe"—a

word sometimes applied to African peoples or societies—is an inappropriate, even inaccurate term, and should be avoided. Based on a concept developed by nineteenth-century Western social theorists, "tribe" was used to describe a group of people sharing a common language, history, geographic region, and sociopolitical organization. In reality, ethnicity and social identity are much more complex, as Africans may identify themselves in multiple ways. For example, an individual may be simultaneously Nigerian, a resident of the Delta State, Ijo (a broad ethnic designation), and Kalabari (an eastern subgroup of the Ijo). Furthermore, the term "tribe" reflects misleading historical and cultural assumptions, as it often implies a kind of cultural backwardness with derogatory associations.

History

Humankind's origins and the beginnings of cultural expression may be traced to Africa. Recent discoveries in the southern tip of Africa provide remarkable evidence of the earliest stirrings of human creativity. Ocher plaques with engraved designs, made some 70,000 years ago, represent some of humankind's earliest attempts at visual expression. Although much remains to be learned about Africa's ancient **civilization**s through further archaeological research, such discoveries suggest tantalizing possibilities for rich insights into human as well as artistic evolution.

Rock paintings depicting domesticated animals provide artistic evidence of the existence of agricultural communities that developed in both the Sahara region and southern Africa by around 7000 B.C. As the Sahara began to dry up, sometime before 3000 B.C., these farming communities moved away. In the north, this led to the emergence of art-producing civilizations based along the Nile, the world's longest river. Egypt, one of the world's earliest nation-states, was unified as a kingdom by 3100 B.C. Further south along the Nile, one of the earliest of the Nubian kingdoms was centered at Kerma in present-day Sudan and dominated trade networks linking central Africa to Egypt for almost one thousand years beginning around 2500 B.C.

A corpus of sophisticated **terracotta** sculptures found over a broad geographic area in present-day Nigeria provides the earliest evidence of a settled community with ironworking technology south of the Sahara. The artistic creations of this culture are referred to as Nok, after the village where the first terracotta was discovered, and date to 500 B.C. to 200 A.D., a period of time coinciding with ancient Greek civilization. Although Nok terracottas continue to be unearthed, no organized excavations have been undertaken and little is known about the culture that produced these sculptures. Terracotta heads, buried around 500 A.D., have also been found in the eastern Transvaal region of South Africa. These important ancient artistic traditions are underrepresented in Western museums today, including the Metropolitan, due to restrictions regarding the export of

archaeological materials. However, examples of these terracotta traditions may be seen in the *Timeline of Art History* on the Metropolitan Museum's website (www.metmuseum.org/toah).

The first millennium A.D. witnessed the urbanization of a number of societies just south of the Sahara, in the broad stretch of savanna referred to as the western Sudan. The strategic location of the Inland Niger Delta, lying in a fertile region between the Bani and Niger rivers, contributed to its emergence as an economic and cultural force in the area. Excavations there at the site of Jenne-jeno ("Old Jenne," also known as Djenne-jeno) suggest the presence of an urban center populated as early as 2,000 years ago. The city continued to thrive for many centuries, becoming an important crossroads of a trans-Saharan trading network. Terracotta figures and fragments unearthed in the region reveal the rich sculptural heritage of a sophisticated urban culture (image 1).

Image 1

By the ninth century, trade across the Sahara had intensified, contributing to the rise of large state societies with diverse cultural traditions along trade routes in the western Sudan as well as introducing Islam into the region. Initially traversed by camel caravans beginning around the fifth century, established trans-Saharan trade routes ensured the lucrative exchange of gold mined in southern West Africa and salt from the Sahara, as well as other goods. Ghana, one of the earliest known kingdoms in this region, grew powerful by the eighth century through its monopoly over gold mines until its eventual demise in the twelfth century. The present-day nation of Ghana takes its name from this ancient empire, although there is no historical or geographic connection. In the early thirteenth century, the kingdom of Mali ascended under the leadership of Sundiata Keita, who is still revered as a culture hero in the Mande-speaking world. At its height, this Islamic empire, which flourished until the seventeenth century, encompassed an area larger than western Europe and established Africa's first university in Timbuktu. Under the Songhai empire of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, one of the largest in Africa, the cities of Timbuktu and Jenne (also known as Djenne) prospered as major centers of Islamic learning.

Image 18

Beyond the kingdoms of the western Sudan, other centers of cultural and artistic activity emerged elsewhere in western Africa. The art of metalworking flourished as early as the ninth century at a site called Igbo-Ukwu, in what is now southern Nigeria. Hundreds of intricate copper alloy castings discovered there provide artistic evidence of a sophisticated and technically accomplished culture. Nearby to the west, the ancient site of Ife, considered the cradle of Yoruba civilization, emerged as a major metropolis by the eleventh century. Artists working for the royal court in Ife produced a large and diverse corpus of masterful work, including magnificent bronze and terracotta sculptures renowned for their portraitlike naturalism. The rich artistic traditions of the Yoruba continue to thrive in the present day (images 18, 19). The neighboring kingdom of Benin, which traces its origins to Ife, established its present dynasty in the fourteenth century. Over the next 500 years, specialist artisans working for the Benin king created

Image 9

several thousand works, mostly made of luxury materials such as ivory and brass, that offer insights into life at the royal court (images 20–22). Other state societies emerged in the eastern and southern parts of the continent.

The Aksum empire (also known as Axum), one of the earliest Christian states in Africa, flourished from the first century A.D. into the eleventh century, producing remarkable stone palaces and enormous granite funerary monoliths. Christian faith inspired the artistic creations of later dynasties, including the extraordinary churches of Lalibela hewn from solid rock in the thirteenth century, and the illuminated manuscripts and other liturgical arts of the later Solomonic era (image 37). Notable among the kingdoms that emerged in southern Africa is Mapungubwe in present-day Zimbabwe, a stratified society that arose in the eleventh century and grew wealthy through trade with Muslim merchants along the eastern African coast. Just to the north are the remains of an ancient city known as Great Zimbabwe, considered one of the oldest and largest architectural structures in sub-Saharan Africa. This massive complex of stone buildings, spread over 1,800 acres, was constructed over 300 years beginning in the eleventh century.

In the fifteenth century, the age of exploration ushered in a period of sustained engagement between Europe and Africa. The Portuguese, and later the Dutch and English, began trade with cities along the western coast of Africa around 1450. They returned from Africa with favorable accounts of powerful kingdoms as well as examples of African artistry commissioned from local sculptors (image 9). These exquisitely carved ivory artifacts, now known as the "Afro-Portuguese" ivories, were brought back from early visits to the continent and became part of the curiosity cabinets of the Renaissance nobles who sponsored exploration and trade.

Through trade, African artists were also introduced to new materials, forms, and ideas. Although historically glass and shell beads were made indigenously, trade with Europe in the sixteenth century introduced large quantities of manufactured glass beads that became widely used throughout Africa (images 26, 36). European imports of copper and coral made these luxury materials more plentiful, and artists used them in greater quantities (image 20). Artifacts of European manufacture, such as canes and chairs, served as prototypes for the development of new prestige items for regional leaders (images 14, 31). Along with goods imported from Europe, the travelers also brought with them their systems of belief, including Christianity. In some cases, such as in the central African kingdom of Kongo, Christianity was embraced and its **iconography** integrated into the artistic repertoire (image 28). In other parts of Africa, the foreign traders themselves were sometimes represented in artworks (image 21).

Image 28

Western trade with Africa was not limited to material goods such as copper, cloth, and beads. By the sixteenth century, the transatlantic slave trade had already begun, forcibly bringing Africans to the newly discovered Americas. Slavery had existed in Africa (as it did elsewhere in the world) for centuries prior

to the sixteenth, and many socially stratified African societies kept slaves for domestic work. The sheer number of slaves traded across the Atlantic, however, was unprecedented, as over 11 million Africans were brought to the Americas and the Caribbean over a period of four centuries. Driven by commercial interests, the slave trade peaked in the eighteenth century with the expansion of American plantation production, and continued until the mid-nineteenth century. While Europeans primarily profited from the slave trade, certain West African kingdoms, like Dahomey, also grew wealthy and powerful by selling captives of war. By the late eighteenth century, the slave trade began to wane as the abolitionist movement grew.

Those who survived the forced migration and the notorious Middle Passage brought their beliefs and cultural practices to the New World. Within this far-flung diaspora, certain cultures—such as the Yoruba and Igbo of today's Nigeria, and the Kongo from present-day Democratic Republic of Congo—were especially well represented. African slaves brought few, if any, personal items with them, although recent archaeological investigations have yielded early African artifacts, like the beads and shells found at the African burial grounds in New York's lower Manhattan, which date to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The influence of Africans in the Americas is perhaps best seen in diverse forms of cultural expression that have enriched our society tremendously. Architectural elements such as open-front porches and sloped hip-roofs reflect African influence in the Americas. The religious practices of Haitian Vodou have roots in the spiritual beliefs of Dahomean, Yoruba, and Kongo peoples. Some elements of cuisine in the American South, such as gumbo and jambalaya, derive from African food traditions. Certain musical forms, such as jazz and the blues, reflect the convergence of African musical practices and European-based traditions.

Although the slave trade was banned entirely by the late nineteenth century, European involvement in Africa did not end. Instead, the desire for greater control over Africa's resources resulted in the colonization of the majority of the continent by seven European countries. The Berlin Conference of 1884–85, attended by representatives of fourteen different European powers, resulted in the regulation of European colonization and trade in Africa. Over the next twenty years, the continent was occupied by France, Belgium, Germany, Britain, Spain, Italy, and Portugal. By 1914, the entire continent, with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia, was colonized by European nations.

The colonial period in Africa brought radical changes, disrupting local political institutions, patterns of trade, and religious and social beliefs. The colonial era also impacted cultural practices in Africa, as artists responded to new forms of patronage and the introduction of new technologies as well as to their changing social and political situations. In some cases, European patronage of local artists resulted in stylistic change (image 35) or new forms of expression. At the same time, many artistic traditions were characterized as "primitive" by Westerners and discouraged or even banned.

Image 22

Although African artifacts were brought to Europe as early as the sixteenth century, it was during the colonial period that such works entered Western collections in significant quantities, forming the basis of many museum collections today. African artifacts were collected as personal souvenirs or ethnographic specimens by military officers, colonial administrators, missionaries, scientists, merchants, and other visitors to the continent. In many of these instances of collecting, objects were gathered through voluntary trade. In one extreme instance, an act of war initiated by Britain against one of its colonies, thousands of royal art objects were removed from the kingdom of Benin following its defeat by a British military expedition in 1897 (images 20–22). European nations with colonies in Africa established ethnographic museums with extensive collections, such as the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium, the Völkerkunde museums in Germany, the British Museum in London, and the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (now housed at the Musée du Quai Branly). In the United States, which had no colonial ties to Africa, the nascent study of ethnography motivated the formation of collections at the American Museum of Natural History in New York and the Field Museum in Chicago. In 1923, the Brooklyn Museum became the first American museum to present African works as art.

Independence movements in Africa began with the liberation of Ghana in 1957 and ended with the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa during the 1990s. The postcolonial period has been challenging, as many countries struggle to regain stability in the aftermath of colonialism. Yet while the media often focuses on political instability, civil unrest, and economic and health crises, these represent only part of the story of Africa today. From its many urban centers to more tradition-based rural villages, Africa is increasingly entering the global marketplace. The proliferation of systems of communication, such as computers and cell phones, throughout Africa has facilitated increased interaction with other parts of the world. As Africa moves into the twenty-first century, hope lies in its natural and human resources and the commitment of many Africans to work toward a stable and prosperous future.

Image 38

In spite of Africa's political, economic, and environmental challenges, the postcolonial period has been a time of tremendous vigor in the realm of artistic production. Many tradition-based artistic practices continue to thrive or have been revitalized. In Guinea, the revival of D'mba performances in the 1990s, after decades of censorship by the Marxist government, is one example of cultural reinvention (image 10). Similarly, in recent years, Merina weavers in the highlands of Madagascar have begun to create brilliantly hued silk cloth known as *akotofahana*, a textile tradition abandoned a century ago (image 38). Photography, introduced on the continent in the late nineteenth century, has become a popular medium, particularly in urban areas. Artists like Seydou Keïta, who operated a portrait studio in Bamako, Mali, in the colonial period, set the stage for later generations of photographers who captured the faces of newly independent African countries (image 39).

It is also important to mention developments in modern and contemporary African art, although these forms of African visual expression are not the focus of this publication. During the colonial period, art schools were established that provided training, often based on Western models, to local artists. Many schools were initiated by Europeans, such as the Congolese Académie des Arts, established by Pierre Romain-Desfossé in 1944 in Elisabethville, whose program was based on those of art schools in Europe. Less frequently, the teaching of modern art was initiated by indigenous Africans, such as Chief Aina Onabolu, who is credited with introducing modern art in Nigeria beginning in the 1920s. Since the mid-twentieth century, increasing numbers of African artists have engaged local traditions in new ways or embraced a national identity through their visual expression.

Image 40

Artists in today's Africa are the products of diverse forms of artistic training, work in a variety of mediums, and engage local as well as global audiences with their work. In recent decades, contemporary artists from Africa, both self-taught and academically trained, have begun to receive international recognition. Many artists from Africa study, work, and/or live in Europe and the United States. Kenyan-born Magdalene Odundo, for example, was trained as an artist in schools in Kenya and in England, where she now lives. The burnished ceramic vessels she creates, which are purely artistic and not functional, embody her diverse sources, including traditional Nigerian and Kenyan vessels as well as Native American pottery traditions of New Mexico (image 40). The work of contemporary African artists like Odundo reveals the complex realities of artistic practice in today's increasingly global society.

The Role of Visual Expression in Africa

Because many tradition-based African artifacts serve a specific function, Westerners sometimes have not regarded them as art. We need to recognize, however, that the concept of "art for art's sake" is a relatively recent invention of the Western world. Prior to the Renaissance, most art traditions around the world were considered functional as well as aesthetic. The objects African artists create, while useful, also embody aesthetic preferences and may be admired for their form and composition.

Aesthetics

Image 13

Artists and patrons in many African societies express well-defined aesthetic preferences and value skillful work. Studies of aesthetics in some African societies have led to the identification of certain artistic criteria for evaluating visual arts. Among the Baule in Côte d'Ivoire, for example, a sculpture of the human figure should emphasize a strong muscular body, refined facial features, and elaborate hairstyle and **scarification** patterns, all of which reflect cultural ideals of civilized beauty (image 13). Scholars of aesthetics in Yoruba (Nigeria) visual expression have identified criteria based on both formal elements, such as a smooth surface, symmetrical composition, and a moderate resemblance to the subject, as well as abstract cultural concepts, such as *ase* (inner power or life force) and *iwa* (character or essential nature). Many African societies associate such smooth, finished surfaces with cultivated refinement.

African aesthetics generally have an ethical or religious basis. An artwork considered "beautiful" is often also believed to be "good," in the sense that it exemplifies and upholds moral values. The fact that, in many societies, the words for beautiful and good are the same suggests a strong correspondence between these two ideas. The ability of an artifact to work effectively, whether that means connecting with the spiritual realm or imparting a lesson to initiates, may also be a standard for determining the "beauty" of an artifact.

Although in the Western world, aesthetics is often equated with beauty, artists in some African cultures create works that are not intended to be beautiful. Such works are deliberately horrific in order to convey their fearsome powers and thereby elicit a strong reaction in the viewer (images 6, 23).

The Human Figure

The human figure is the main subject that traditionally has engaged African artists. African figurative sculpture usually departs from natural proportions. There is often a conceptual basis behind artistic conventions such as the simplification and exaggeration of the human features. For example, in many

African artworks, the head appears proportionately larger than the body. This formal emphasis has **symbolic** meaning, as the head is believed to have a special role in guiding one's destiny and success in many African societies. African artists also employ scale for symbolic effect in multifigure compositions, a practice known as hierarchical representation. In these cases, the most important individual is depicted as the largest figure, while those of lesser importance decrease in size exponentially (image 22).

Animals and the Natural World

Animals with special attributes—such as antelopes, snakes, leopards, and crocodiles—are represented in art for symbolic purposes. For example, the nineteenth-century Fon king Guezo is represented by a buffalo, an animal signifying strength and determination, selected as his emblem through *fa* divination (image 16). Representations of animals consuming other animals may serve as a metaphor for competing spiritual or social forces (image 19). Their depiction is meant to encourage other, less destructive means to resolve a difficult social encounter. Features of different types of animals may also be combined into new forms that synthesize complex ideas. Among the Bamana, for example, *ci wara* headdresses (image 5) are based on the features of various antelope species and may also incorporate those of aardvarks, anteaters, and pangolins, all highly symbolic animals. The resulting synthesis of animal forms evokes the mythic Ci Wara, the divine force conceptualized as half man and half antelope who introduced agricultural methods to the Bamana. Animal symbols may also take more abstract form. In the Cameroon Grassfields, circular medallions represent spiders, a symbol of supernatural wisdom, and diamond-shaped motifs refer to frogs, which stand for fertility and increase (image 26). Some forms of symbolism in African art use plants as points of reference. On cast plaques from Benin, a background pattern of river leaves is a symbol for Olokun, god of the sea (image 22).

Image 26

Other Forms of Symbolism

Symbols may be nonrepresentational. Geometric patterns on Bwa plank masks have multiple levels of meaning that refer to ideals of social and moral behavior taught to initiates (image 8). Materials also hold symbolic value. Gold foil used in Asante **regalia** alludes to the sun and to life's vital force (image 14). Indigenous forms of writing, such as *nsibidi* used among various cultures in Nigeria's Cross River region (image 24), embody multiple levels of symbolic meaning that can be accessed only by the initiated. Gestures, too, are a form of symbolism. In Kongo art, a seated pose illustrates a dictum about balance, composure, and reflection (image 29), while a protruding tongue refers indirectly to the activation of medicines (image 30).

Image 14

Abstraction and Idealization

Realism or physical resemblance is generally not the goal of the African artist. Many forms of African art are characterized by their visual abstraction, or departure from representational accuracy. Artists interpret human or animal forms creatively through innovative form and composition. The degree of abstraction can range from idealized naturalism, as in the cast brass heads of Benin kings (image 20), to more simplified, geometrically conceived forms, as in the Baga headdress (image 10). The decision to create abstract representations is a conscious one, evidenced by the technical ability of African artists to create **naturalistic** art, as seen, for example, in the art of Ife, in present-day Nigeria.

Image 10

Idealization is frequently seen in representations of human beings. Individuals are almost always depicted in the prime of life, never in old age or poor health. Culturally accepted standards of moral character and physical beauty are expressed through formal emphasis. Masks used by the women's Sande society, for example, present Mende cultural ideals of female beauty (image 11). Instead of a physical likeness, the artist highlights admired features, such as narrow eyes, a small mouth, carefully braided hair, and a ringed neck. Idealized images often relate to expected social roles and emphasize distinctions between male and female. In Bamana statuary, full breasts and a swelling belly highlight a woman's role as nurturer (image 4). At the same time, complementary male and female pairs of figures express the concept of an ideal social unit through matched gestures, stances, and expressions (image 13).

Surface

Image 17

Once an artifact leaves its creator's hands, its visual appearance may be altered through use in **ritual** or performance contexts. Repeated handling of an artifact during ceremonies can create a smoothly worn surface, while ritual applications of palm oil may result in a lustrous sheen (image 27). During ceremonies, decorative elements, such as beads, metal jewelry, and fabric, can be added to a work (image 13). Applications of sacrificial substances and organic materials create an encrusted surface that literally and figuratively empowers an object (images 6, 17). Masks and figurative sculptures may also be repainted from one season to the next. Bwa masks, for example, are soaked after the harvest and repainted red, white, and black, generally with natural vegetal or mineral pigments but now also with European enamel paints (image 8).

Form and Meaning

While creations by African artists have been admired by Western viewers for their formal power and beauty, it is important to understand these artifacts on their own terms. Many African artworks were (and continue to be) created to serve a social, religious, or political function. In its original setting, an artifact may have

different uses and embody a variety of meanings. These uses may change over time. A mask originally created for a particular performance may be used in a different context at a later time. N*wantantay* masks, used by the southern Bwa in Burkina Faso, may be performed during burial ceremonies and also for annual renewal rites (image 8).

Artworks can also have different meanings for different individuals or groups. A sculpture owned by an elite association holds deeper levels of meaning for its members than for the general public, who may understand only its basic meaning. The painted designs on an Ejagham headdress, for example, represent an indigenous form of writing, the meanings of which are restricted to individuals of the highest status and rank (image 24). Understanding the cultural contexts and symbolic meanings of African art therefore enhances our appreciation of its form.

Image 24

Religion and the Spiritual Realm

Image 8

Most traditional religions in Africa have developed at the local level and are unique to a particular society. Common elements include a belief in a creator god, who is rarely if ever represented in art and directly approached by worshipers. Instead, the supreme deity is petitioned through intermediaries, or lesser spirits. These spirits may be related to the natural world and have control over powerful natural phenomena. For instance, *nwantantay* masks used by the Bwa of Burkina Faso represent various flying spirits that inhabit the natural world and can offer protection (image 8). These flying spirits are believed to take physical form as insects or water fowl. In Guinea, Baga beliefs describe local water spirits, called Niniganné, associated with both wealth and danger that take symbolic form as snakes (image 9). Nature spirits, appealed to by Baule **diviner**s in Côte d'Ivoire for spiritual insights, are conceived of as grotesque beings associated with untamed wilderness (image 13).

Other spirits represent founding **ancestor**s, whose activities are described in stories about the creation of the world and the beginnings of human life and agriculture. The Dogon of Mali recount their genesis story with reference to Nommo, a primordial being who guided an ark with the eight original ancestors from heaven to populate the earth (image 2). Also in Mali, Bamana agricultural ceremonies invoke Ci Wara, the half man and half antelope credited with introducing agriculture to humanity (image 5). The original ancestors in Senufo (Côte d'Ivoire) belief are represented by a monumental pair of male and female figures exemplifying an ideal social unit (image 7).

The category of spirits believed to be most accessible to humans is that of recently deceased ancestors, who can intercede on behalf of the living community. Among the Akan in Ghana, ancestors are commemorated by terracotta sculptures that, when placed in a sacred grove near the cemetery, serve as a focal point for funeral rites and a point of contact with the deceased (image 15). Fang societies

preserved the bones of important deceased individuals in bark containers in the belief that their relics held great spiritual power (image 27). In many large states, a living king and leader may be regarded as divine as well. In the kingdom of Benin, in today's Nigeria, the Oba historically was considered semidivine and therefore constituted the political and spiritual focus of the kingdom (images 20, 22).

Image 37

In addition to indigenous religions at a local level, other religions are also practiced throughout Africa. Christianity has existed in Egypt and northern Africa since the second century. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was established in the fourth century by King Ezana, who adopted Christianity as the state religion (image 37). In the late fifteenth century, Christianity was introduced into sub-Saharan Africa by Portuguese explorers and traders. Although most African cultures did not adopt the religion, the Kongo king Afonso Mvemba a Nzinga established Christianity as the state religion in the early sixteenth century (image 28). During the colonial period, Christianity gained converts throughout the continent.

Islam came to Egypt after 640, then spread below the Sahara in the eighth and ninth centuries through traders and scholars. On the east coast, Arab and Persian colonizers introduced Islam beginning in the eighth century. Although the acceptance of Islam or Christianity sometimes precluded the practice of traditional religions, in many cases they coexisted or were incorporated into preexisting beliefs. The adoption of Islam and Christianity also led to the abandonment of many earlier forms of artistic expression.

Religious practice in Africa centers on a desire to engage the spiritual world in the interests of social stability and well-being. Annual rites of renewal among the Bwa, for example, are designed to seek the continued goodwill of nature spirits (image 8). Political leaders also seek religious guidance to ensure the success of their reign. Fon kings, for example, referenced a divination process known as *fa*, which predicted the nature and character of their reign (image 16). Personal misfortune, such as illness, death, or barrenness, or community crises, including war or drought, are also cause to petition the spirits for guidance and assistance.

Art objects are employed as vehicles for spiritual communication in diverse ways. Some are created for use in an altar or shrine and may receive sacrificial offerings. The Dogon of Mali, for example, show gratitude to the ancestors by offering pieces of meat in a monumental container presented to the family altar (image 2). In the kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), cast brass heads commemorating deceased kings are placed on royal ancestral altars, where they serve as a point of contact with the king's royal ancestors (image 20).

Image 2

Other objects are used by diviners to attract and tap into spiritual forces. The dazzling beauty of an expertly carved Baule figure sculpture lures a nature spirit into inhabiting the sculpture, thereby aiding a diviner's work (image 13). Such objects themselves are often not inherently powerful but must be activated through ritual offerings or by a knowledgeable religious specialist. Fon diviners empower figurative sculptures called *bocio* with organic substances that ensure

their client's health and well-being (image 17). Similarly, Kongo ritual objects known as *nkisi* derive their potency from various substances, both organic and man-made, added to a carved figure by a ritual specialist (image 30).

Image 3

The unseen forces of nature or the spiritual world are called upon to serve a variety of purposes, including communicating with the spirits, honoring ancestors, healing sickness, or reinforcing societal standards, through masked performances. **Masquerade**s involve the active participation of dancers, musicians, and even the audience, in addition to the masked dancer, who serves as the vehicle through which these invisible powers become manifest. By donning a mask and its associated costume, the dancer transcends his own identity and is transformed into a powerful spiritual being. Among the Dogon, masks are worn at *dama*, a collective funerary rite for men whose goal is to ensure safe passage of the deceased's spirit to the world of the ancestors (image 3). Masked performances by members of the Bamana Komo association convey knowledge of their history, beliefs, and rituals to initiated members (image 6). The massive sculpted headdress known as D'mba among the Baga is seen as a symbol of cultural reinvention and appears on various occasions marking personal and communal growth (image 10). Among the Mende and their neighbors, masquerades of the Sande society encourage and celebrate young female initiates and offer a model of feminine beauty and spiritual power (image 11).

Art and Politics

Political institutions in Africa that predate European colonization have ranged from large, centralized kingdoms led by a single ruler to smaller, village-based societies. Centralized states may vary in size and complexity but are generally ruled by a chief or king, supported by a hierarchical bureaucracy. In many different societies, leaders are considered to be semidivine. In less centralized societies, power is not vested in a single individual. Instead, authority may be exercised by family heads, a council of elders, or local social or political institutions. African political institutions were dramatically impacted by colonial rule. The role of traditional rulers continues to change in postindependence Africa, where modern states are governed by national leaders.

Image 16

In centralized states, leaders have historically played an important role as patrons of the arts. Often, leaders held monopolies over the materials used and controlled artistic production as well (image 20). They commissioned a wide range of prestige objects, distinguished by the lavish use of luxury materials (images 14, 16, 20–22, 26), as well as complex architectural programs (image 18). Works made of metal, ivory, or beads were not only visually spectacular, but also reminded the public of the king's wealth and power. Such art forms underscored the king's fundamental difference from—and superiority to—his subjects.

Royal arts are often used in ceremonial contexts that mark and legitimize political authority. Handheld objects, such as flywhisks, staffs, and pipes, are used as personal regalia to indicate rank and position within the court (images 14, 26).

Image 31

Special seats of office (images 31, 34) and clothes and regalia made of expensive materials (image 21) distinguish the leader's exalted position and set him apart, both literally and figuratively, from his subjects. Larger works legitimize political power to a broad public. Portraits of past leaders document dynastic lines of leadership and serve as a visual reminder of the present king's legacy (images 20, 25, 29). Such portraits generally present an idealized depiction of a youthful and vigorous king and emphasize the various trappings of royalty.

Among smaller, village-based societies, in which governance is distributed among local associations, artworks do not glorify a particular leader. Instead of lavish displays of royal regalia, masks and figures are used as agents of social control or education. Such works are generally commissioned by a group of individuals, such as a council of elders or members of a religious association. They give visual form to spiritual forces whose power is enlisted to maintain order and well-being in a community. Sometimes, artworks are deliberately fearsome, employing elements of the natural world considered inherently powerful, such as sacrificial blood or medicinal plants (image 6). In other contexts, the sculpture's imagery presents cultural ideals held collectively by the society (images 5, 7, 12, 24).

Rites of Passage

In many African societies, art plays an important role in various rites of passage throughout the cycle of life. These rituals mark an individual's transition from one stage of life to another. The birth of a child, a youth's coming of age, and the funeral of a respected elder are all events in which an individual undergoes a change of status. During these transitional periods, individuals are considered to be especially vulnerable to spiritual forces. Art objects are therefore created and employed to assist in the rite of passage and to reinforce community values.

Image 7

The birth of a child is an important event, not only for a family but for society as well. Children ensure the continuity of a community, and therefore a woman's ability to bear children inspires awe. Ideals of motherhood and nurturance are often expressed visually through figurative sculpture. Among the Senufo, for example, female figures pay homage to the important roles women play as founders of **lineage**s and guardians of male initiates (image 7). The importance of motherhood is symbolized by a gently swelling belly and lines of scarification radiating from the navel, considered the source of life. In other societies, such as the Bamana, figural sculptures are employed in ceremonies designed to assist women having difficulty conceiving (image 4). They serve simultaneously as a point of contact for spiritual intercession and as a visual reminder of physical and moral ideals.

Initiation, or the coming of age of a boy or girl, is a transition frequently marked by ceremony and **celebration**. The education of youths in preparation for the responsibilities of adulthood is often a long and arduous process. Initiation rites usually begin at the onset of puberty. Boys, and to a lesser extent girls, are

separated from their families and taken to a secluded area on the outskirts of the community where they undergo a sustained period of instruction and, more typically in the past than now, circumcision. At the conclusion of this mentally and physically rigorous period, they are reintroduced to society as fully initiated adults and given the responsibilities and privileges that accompany their new status.

During initiation, artworks protect and impart moral lessons to the youths. The spiritual forces associated with this period of transformation are often given visual expression in the form of masked performances. During the initiation of boys, male dancers wearing wooden masks may make several appearances (image 32). Their performances can serve diverse purposes—to educate boys about their future social role, to bolster morale, to impress upon them respect for authority, or simply to entertain and relieve stress. The initiation of girls rarely includes the use of wooden masks, focusing more on transforming the body through the application of pigment. The women's Sande society, found among the Mende and their neighbors, is one of the few organizations in which women wear wooden masks as part of initiation ceremonies (image 11). Many initiation organizations continue in today's Africa, often adapting to contemporary lifestyles. For example, in the past, the Sande society's initiation process could take months to complete; now, Sande sessions have adapted to the calendars of secondary schools and initiation may be completed during vacation and holiday periods.

Image 32

In many African societies, death is not considered an end but rather another transition. The passing of a respected elder is a time of grief and lamentation but also celebration. In this final rite of passage, the deceased joins the realm of the honored ancestors. While the dead are buried soon after death, a formal funeral often takes place at a later time. Funeral ceremonies with masked performances serve to celebrate the life of an individual and to assist the soul of the deceased in his or her passage from the human realm to that of the spirits (image 3). Such ceremonies generally mark the end of a period of mourning and may be collective, honoring the lives of the deceased over a number of years.

Figurative sculpture is also employed to commemorate important ancestors. Representations of the deceased, individualized through details of hairstyle, dress, and scarification, serve not only as memorials but also as a focal point for rituals communicating with ancestors (images 15, 20). In some central African societies, certain bones of the deceased are believed to contain great power and are preserved in a **reliquary**. In such cases, figurative sculpture attached to the reliquary does not represent the ancestor but honors and amplifies the power of the sacred relics (image 27).

Image 15

Art and the Individual

While many kinds of African art are employed in communal contexts, others serve the needs of individuals. Domestic furnishings and objects of personal use, while practical in purpose, also have an aesthetic dimension. The artistic enhancement

of objects of utilitarian function reflect and reinforce an individual's standing and status in society. Details of form and decoration personalize an object, marking it as the property of a specific individual and, occasionally, providing information about ethnic affiliation, social status, or rank. At the same time, the artistic inventiveness and careful execution of such works clearly indicate a desire to integrate aesthetics into daily life.

Image 36

Personal adornment and dress are important forms of aesthetic expression. Scarification and hairstyle, in particular, are regarded by Africans as means by which the body is refined and civilized. Specifics of bodily ornamentation are often depicted in fine detail on masks and figurative sculpture, indicating their importance as symbols of cultural, personal, and/or professional identity (images 5, 7, 10, 13). Dress is also a means of self-expression and definition. Certain forms of textiles identify the wearer by age or status and may also convey personal identity as well (images 33, 36). Textiles have also historically been conceived as a form of wealth and their extensive use comments upon the wearer's access to riches.

Western Appreciation of African Art

The appreciation of African art in the Western world has had an enormous impact not only on the development of modern art in Europe and the United States, but also on the way African art is presented in a Western museum setting. Although objects from Africa were brought to Europe as early as the fifteenth century, it was during the colonial period that a greater awareness of African art developed. The cultural and aesthetic milieu of late-nineteenth-century Europe fostered an atmosphere in which African artifacts, once regarded as mere curios, became admired for their artistic qualities.

Image 27

African sculpture, in particular, served as a catalyst for the innovations of modernist artists. Seeking alternatives to realistic representation, Western artists admired African sculpture for its abstract conceptual approach to the human form. For example, the powerfully carved Fang reliquary figure, with its bulbous and fluid forms, attracted the attention of the painter André Derain and the sculptor Jacob Epstein, both of whom once owned the sculpture (image 27).

Increasing interest among artists and their patrons gradually brought African art to prominence in the Western art world. Along with this growing admiration for African art, the aesthetic preferences of collectors and dealers resulted in the development of distinctions between art and artifact. Masks and figurative statuary in wood and metal—genres and media most readily assimilated into established categories of fine art in the West—were preferred over more overtly utilitarian objects, such as vessels or staffs. Masks and figurative statuary are more commonly found in western and central Africa. The legacy of early Western taste, with its emphasis on sculptural forms such as masks and figures, continues to inform most museum collections of African art.

As African art became more widely appreciated in the West, scholars began to study both its stylistic diversity and the meanings that African artifacts hold for their makers. Our understanding of African art has been shaped by the work of anthropologists and art historians, many of whom have spent considerable time doing research in Africa on specific cultural traditions. African scholars are also undertaking research into their own heritage. Their sustained commentaries have led to new information and insights, providing a better understanding of the complex cultural meanings embodied in art. At the same time, scholars today recognize that interpreting the creation, form, and use of African art is an inexact science, as meanings and functions shift over time and across regions.

Artists and Patronage

Artists in Africa

Traditional African artists are generally regarded as skilled professionals, though they have varied training. Some are born into families of specialist artisans. Among Mande cultures in western Africa, such as the Bamana of Mali, artisans are a separate caste from the majority farmer group. Artisans such as blacksmiths, carvers, potters, and leather workers inherit their professions and generally marry within their groups (image 6). In the former kingdom of Dahomey (now Republic of Benin), members of the Huntondji family served Fon kings as jewelers and smiths for generations beginning in the eighteenth century (image 16).

Image 12

Other artists learn through long-term apprenticeship and study under a master artist. The Yoruba artist Olowe of Ise, who was active in what is now Nigeria from the late nineteenth century until his death in 1938, became a master sculptor after years of apprenticeship (image 18). Some artists are self-taught and learn their craft informally. In some African societies, artists believe they are called to their profession by a spiritual force. The master artist Zlan, active among Dan and We communities during the first half of the twentieth century, considered carving to be his destiny (image 12). His profession was originally ordained in a relative's dream before his birth and confirmed during his youth when an **adze** fell from a palm oil tree his uncle was cutting.

European-style art schools, introduced in the colonial period, also offer artistic training. Most traditional artists in Africa do not produce art as a full-time occupation, but must earn a living through other means, such as farming. However, some royal kingdoms, such as Dahomey and Benin, supported guilds where artists worked exclusively for the king and his court.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the materials artists work with and their techniques are historically specialized according to gender. Wood carving and metallurgy, for example, are often the exclusive domain of male artists, while pottery is typically considered women's art. In areas in which men and women practice the same art, such as weaving, their work is usually differentiated by technique, material, or style. For example, throughout western Africa, men weave long strips of cloth using a horizontal loom, while women produce wider textiles using a vertical loom. There are, of course, exceptions that suggest these gender divisions are not rigid. Kuba men and women in Democratic Republic of Congo collaborate in the creation of **raffia** textiles, which are woven by men and embroidered by women (image 33). In some communities, like the Mangbetu (Democratic Republic of Congo), men work as potters. The We master carver Zlan is said to have been assisted in sculpting by his wife, Sonzlanwon ("snail, if God agrees") (image 12).

Artists have diverse social roles within their communities throughout Africa. Some are highly regarded for their artistic skills. Others are respected for their

ability to work with certain materials. For example, blacksmiths are generally regarded as exceptionally powerful individuals, whose ability to transform ore into workable metal is seen akin to the creation of human life. In some communities, an artist who creates powerful objects is considered dangerous or socially aberrant. His exceptional abilities are thought to be outside the realm of ordinary human behavior.

Image 34

Although historically, most artifacts created by African artists were unsigned, their authors were not anonymous. The artist's name was often known and remembered by the owner of the artifact and others within their community. Among the Yoruba, for example, respected artists are celebrated and recalled through the recitation of *oriki*, a genre of recited praise poetry (image 18). Unfortunately, until the second half of the twentieth century, most collectors failed to record such information and therefore museums lack the documentation necessary to identify an artifact by its artist. Happily, there are instances in which the artist's name is known (images 12, 18, 19) or an individual's stylistic traits have been identified (image 34).

Absent such information about the artist, however, African objects are usually identified by their ethnic or regional origin. Earlier studies of African art equated ethnicity with style. Today, scholars recognize that, although certain formal parameters of artistic expression may predominate in any given society, style is not exclusively determined by culture. While artists often work within local conventions of form and style, it is important to remember that they also work creatively. An artist's aesthetic choices, such as proportion, scale, details, and decoration, individualize the artwork.

Image 40

Furthermore, style is not a fixed entity. There may be multiple styles of art within one cultural group. Some Fon artists, for example, produce luxury objects sheathed in silver for royal patrons, while others in the same society create artifacts encrusted with organic materials used in divination (images 16, 17). Style may cross cultural borders—as patrons commission works from artists in neighboring societies—or change over time. The concept of cultural style is perhaps most problematic in the case of African artists who work in contemporary urban or global contexts (images 39, 40).

Patronage

African artists historically responded to the specific needs of a patron. Patrons may be political leaders or groups, members of associations, families or lineages, or individuals. Artists generally work for patrons from the same culture and therefore share a common understanding about an object's style and use. Artists can also produce objects for neighboring or foreign patrons, which sometimes leads to the introduction of new forms or styles. For instance, the tradition of carving and performing wooden masks is a recent one among the southern Bwa in Burkina Faso, adopted within the past hundred years from neighboring peoples (image 8). The patronage of African artists at coastal carving centers by

Image 9

Portuguese navigators during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries resulted in the creation and export of finely carved ivory prestige items, like the saltcellar made for the table of a European noble (image 9).

The patron who buys and uses the artwork plays an important role in the object's appearance and its social context. While an artist may follow local conventions of style and form, specific features or stylistic innovations may be incorporated during the process of creation at the patron's request. The patron may also contribute to the appearance of the object after it has been purchased from the artist. For example, palm oil may be applied to the surface of a figural sculpture during its ritual use (image 27). and masks may be repainted by their owners from year to year.

Materials and Techniques

Many tradition-based works of African art are made of perishable materials and are therefore subject to damage wrought by climate and insects in Africa. Most artifacts in museums were collected in the early twentieth century and were generally no older than a century at that time. For that reason, they have been dated from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Unlike Western art, which places a high value on permanence, many forms of African art were meant to meet the needs of only the original patron or even to serve a short-lived function. Importance was placed on the creative process itself, whether it be art making or ritual performance. The object itself could be renewed or replaced.

Image 4

Wood

African sculpture is generally made of wood, an impermanent material subject to termite or other environmental damage. Wooden sculptures from Africa in Western collections generally date no earlier than the late nineteenth century, though some older objects are known to exist. In arid climates like the western Sudan, wood sculpture has been preserved for longer periods (image 4). In such cases, the wood used for the sculpture may be dated by radiocarbon analysis, a method of calculating the age of organic materials (such as wood, bone, and shell) based on measuring the radioactive decay of carbon. This method is useful only if the artifact is more than 200 years old.

The type of wood chosen by a sculptor is sometimes symbolically significant and may require ritual preparation. Some Dogon sculptors, for example, must offer a sacrifice to the spirit of a tree before using its wood.

Most African wood sculpture is made from a single piece of wood. Carving in wood (as with stone or ivory) is a subtractive technique. The traditional tools of an African sculptor are the ax or the adze. An adze is similar to an ax, except that the blade is perpendicular rather than parallel to the handle. Using an ax or adze, the sculptor blocks out a generalized form from a large block of wood. As he refines the form through increasing definition, the sculptor may also use a knife to cut fine details. Some sculptures are smoothed and shined, some painted with locally made or imported pigments, and others encrusted with organic and other materials.

Image 18

In the Yoruba creative process, the various stages of the carving process are clearly defined. After visualizing the desired form, the sculptor selects a piece of freshly cut, green wood, which he keeps wet to facilitate carving. The first of four stages, called *ona lile*, involves the preliminary blocking out of the wood with an ax or adze. In the next step, *aletunle*, these main forms are refined into smaller masses, such as ears, hands, and eyes, using an adze or chisel. Smoothing of the carving, using a knife or chisel, is the third stage, called *didan*. Finally, the artist uses a knife to carve fine details, completing the sculpture, a stage known as *fifin*.

In Yoruba society, a potential carver begins an extended apprenticeship with a master sculptor around age ten. The sculptor supervises the apprentice, introducing him to tools and materials as well as principles of design and their execution. In the beginning, the apprentice assists only with the most basic tasks such as the smoothing of the wood surface. With experience, he is allowed to block out the preliminary form. After several years of training, a talented apprentice may continue as a paid assistant and then eventually establish his own workshop.

Image 21

Ivory

Ivory from elephants holds both material and symbolic value. It is prized for its physical properties such as strength, density, and smoothness. Considered a luxury material, ivory was an important commercial commodity in trade with Europe. Because the elephant denotes strength and power in many African societies, ivory is also often used for arts associated with leadership. In centralized kingdoms, such as Benin (Nigeria), the use of ivory was historically an exclusive prerogative of royalty. The color of ivory is significant in some cultures, since white is associated with ritual purity and spirituality in general (image 21).

Ivory was generally carved by the same artist who sculpted wood, using similar techniques. Carvers used a knife or adze and polished the surface with a rough textured leaf or other abrasive material. Fresh ivory, from the tusks of recently killed elephants, was more oily and therefore easier to carve. In some societies, ivory carvers constituted a separate category of artisans. At the court of Benin, for example, the ivory carvers were organized into a guild known as I*gbesamwan* and lived and worked in separate quarters. In Lega society, the ownership of ivory artifacts historically has been restricted to members of the highest levels of the Bwami association, the core political and social institution. Today, ivory carving is still practiced in some areas of Africa, though to a much lesser extent given the international ban on ivory trade.

Image 29

Stone

While the large-scale stone sculptures of ancient Egypt are well known, in sub-Saharan Africa stone has not been as widely used as wood as an artistic medium. The massive architectural structures at Great Zimbabwe and the large stelae at Aksum are among the few examples of the use of stone on a monumental scale. Among those societies that used stone as a medium, such as the Kongo, the material was often associated with inevitability and permanence (image 29). Although many traditions of stone carving have not continued in the present day, some forms of sculpture are products of more recent artistic developments. One well-known artistic movement is that of contemporary Zimbabwean stone sculpture, which was initiated in the late 1950s by Frank McEwen, director of the National Museum of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Local Shona artists were

encouraged by McEwen, a British artist, to work in stone, a material associated with the ancient ruins and sculpture of Great Zimbabwe, and many artists continue to produce stone sculpture today.

Metal

Metalworking in sub-Saharan Africa may date to at least the seventh century B.C. There is early evidence of iron smelting technology and the forging of iron ore to create agricultural tools and weapons. Because metalworking was both an intrinsically dangerous process and an important technological skill, blacksmiths were (and are) highly regarded throughout much of Africa. In many African origin stories, for example, the founding culture hero is either a blacksmith or introduces the necessary skills to his people. Iron as a material is generally thought to be inherently powerful, and is often associated with the gods (image 16). Most ironworking throughout sub-Saharan Africa involves highly ritualized practices, as the process of transforming ore into metal is likened to the creation of human life.

Luxury metals available locally include gold and copper alloys (bronze and brass). Indeed, at one point in history, most of the gold supply in Europe came from West Africa. Through trade with Europe beginning in the fifteenth century, metals like copper alloy and silver became more plentiful. Because these metals were considered precious materials, they were generally used for prestige objects and signified wealth and power. Such metals were most often cast (images 20, 22, 28), but could also be worked in other ways, such as hammering into sheets. In some cultures, encasing a wooden object in sheet metal or metal foil was one way to maximize the visual effects of a costly material without using the vast quantities of metal required for casting (images 14, 16).

Image 20

The art of **lost-wax** casting, dating to at least the ninth century south of the Sahara, is an important one in Africa. The technique is similar to that used in Europe, but was developed independently. In fact, the virtuoso lifesize cast metal sculptures of Ife were created beginning around the twelfth to thirteenth century, a time when European artisans had not mastered casting on such a scale.

To briefly summarize the technique, the process begins by covering a core of clay with a layer of wax. This wax layer is then modeled, carved, and incised by the sculptor to create final surface details. Another layer of clay then encases the wax form and is left to dry. After drying, the clay mold is heated to melt the wax. Molten metal is poured in the clay mold. Once the metal has cooled, the clay mold is broken open, resulting in a unique work.

Clay

Works made of fired clay, or terracotta, are among the earliest surviving artifacts from the African continent. Sites in the Sahara Desert have yielded terracotta objects that have been dated to the eighth millennium B.C. The corpus of

Image 15

terracotta figures known as Nok constitutes the earliest known sculptural tradition in sub-Saharan Africa. Works made of terracotta include vessels as well as figurative objects (images 1, 15, 40). Many terracotta works—both figurative and nonfigurative—are used in important rituals, particularly those relating to funerary practices (image 15).

The technique of making ceramic vessels of clay is highly developed throughout Africa and usually practiced by women. Vessels are almost always built from hand without the aid of a potter's wheel. Expert potters create perfectly formed vessels by coiling or molding. After the vessel dries, it is fired outside in open pits. Decoration is usually done before firing, either by working designs into the clay or applying slip or vegetal solutions. The process of firing clay, like that of working metal, is also highly ritualized, though to a lesser extent. Traditionally, the process has been accompanied by certain taboos and restrictions intended to ensure successful firing. Potters today continue to use traditional methods of production, though some contemporary ceramic artists introduce new technologies in their work (image 40).

Mud, which is clay in its most basic form, is also used in African architecture. It serves as a building material, either applied over a preexisting framework or used in the form of mud bricks. Mud is also used for the exterior decoration of houses, where it may be molded into **relief** designs or used as paint. Perhaps the most well-known example of mud brick architecture is the Great Mosque at Jenne, originally built in the thirteenth century, in Mali. The mosque is believed to be the largest adobe structure in the world and certainly is among the greatest achievements of African architecture.

Image 33

Fiber

In Africa, cloth is made from locally available fibers, including cotton, wool, silk, raffia palm leaves, and bark, as well as imports such as rayon (images 33, 38). Pounded bark may have been the earliest form of cloth in Africa and continues to be produced by some pygmy groups in central Africa. The other materials are woven on looms. Weaving is done by both men and women throughout Africa, although methods of production are generally differentiated by gender. In western Africa, for example, men weave long, narrow strips of cloth on a loom that is oriented horizontally. Women produce broader lengths of woven cloth on a vertical loom. Woven textiles are decorated using diverse methods, such as dyeing, painting, stamping, appliqué, embroidery, and printing. Other forms of natural fibers, such as reeds and grasses, are used in basketry. Basketry techniques are used to produce objects, such as containers, hats, and shields, as well as in some forms of architecture.

Painting

Image 19

The use of pigment for artistic expression in Africa may date to as early as 70,000 years ago. Paintings on rock are found throughout the African continent, the earliest examples in the Saharan region possibly dating to 8000 B.C. Other significant examples of rock painting are found in eastern and southern Africa. With important exceptions, such as rock painting and also Ethiopian manuscripts and painted church interiors (image 37), pigments are applied to three-dimensional forms in Africa—sculptural works (images 8, 19), architectural structures (image 18), and the human body. Historically, artists used naturally derived pigments, such as ocher and indigo, although today commercially made paints are also used. Often, certain colors or materials have symbolic value (image 8). For example, white clay, called **kaolin**, is used widely throughout Africa, applied on the human body or on artifacts, to signify spirituality (image 13). Paint has become an increasingly popular medium from the twentieth century to today, especially in the vernacular sign paintings found throughout western Africa and in the work of academically trained contemporary artists.

Other Materials and Media

Image 39

African artists use many other kinds of materials in the creation of artworks. Beads are used throughout much of Africa, often in the making of prestige objects. Many kinds of beads, particularly those made of seeds, shells, bone, or coral, are locally available in Africa. Others, especially glass beads, are of Indian or European manufacture and historically have been imported, often in great quantities. Animal hide, a strong and durable material, is also used to create objects, such as shields or items of dress. Different materials are often combined for practical, symbolic, or aesthetic effect (image 3). Organic material, derived from plants or animals, may be added or applied to an object for ritual purposes (images 6, 17). The technique of covering a wood form with animal skin is unique to a part of eastern Nigeria (image 24). Western techniques and materials, such as photography and concrete, are also widely used in Africa today (image 39).

Introduction to the Visual Materials

The images of art in this section are grouped by geographic region and within each region according to ethnic group. Images 38–40 depict modern and contemporary works of art.

Dimensions of each artwork are noted to avoid misunderstandings about scale. Keep in mind that many of these objects were used in certain practical contexts. For example, remind the students that the masks and headdresses are intended to be seen in motion and together with costume. (You may want to view the enclosed video, which provides appropriate context for some of the headdresses.) Many of the three-dimensional works of art were also adorned and carried in rituals.

Please familiarize yourself with the images and their descriptions. Initially you might have the students view some of the images without providing information to see what their reactions and questions will be. Ask the students to describe what they see. When your class is ready to look at the images in more depth, you may decide to lead the discussion or assign one or more works of art to each student, who will study the descriptions and be the "expert" for those images. The description of each work of art is followed by questions designed to stimulate class discussion. (In addition, selected works are presented in pairs in the Comparisons for Classroom Discussion section of this resource. By engaging in these comparing and contrasting exercises, the students will discern the distinctive features of the works of art.) As the discussion proceeds, students will become more comfortable expressing ideas about how the formal elements of art clarify its meaning and function.

Themes

The images are grouped by theme below. Select themes that are most appropriate for your group and which might provide a focus for a Museum visit. The lesson plans, activities, and discussion topics in the Classroom Applications section are based on these themes. Older students, individually or in small groups, could be assigned reports (oral, written, or both) focused on particular themes.

Animal symbols

2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21–24, 26

Human figures

1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9–15, 17–25, 27–32, 34, 35, 37, 39

Masks and headdresses

3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 19, 21, 24, 32

Function; communication with the spirit world

To define and praise leadership

12, 14, 16, 18, 20–23, 25, 28, 31, 33–34

Quick List of the Works of Art

Quick List of the Works of Art

1 Seated Figure,
13th century; ca. 1235
Mali, Inland Niger
Delta region

2 Ritual Container
(*Adun koro*), 16th–19th centrury
Mali; Dogon

3 Mask and Hood (*Kanaga*),
19th–20th century
Mali; Dogon

4
Mother and Child
(Gwandusu);
Seated Male with Lance
(Gwantigi),
15th–20th century
Mali; Bamana

5 Male and Female
Antelope Headdresses
(*Ci wara kun*),
19th–20th century
Mali, Segou region; Bamana

6 Komo Headdress (*Komokunw*),
19th–20th century
Mali; Bamana

7 Ancestral Couple (*Pombibele*),
19th–20th century
Côte d'Ivoire, Korhogo
region; Senufo

8 Mask (*Nwantantay*),
19th–20th century
Burkina Faso; Bwa

9 Lidded Saltcellar,
15th–16th century
Sierra Leone;
Sapi-Portuguese

10 Headdress (D'mba
or Yamban),
19th–20th century
Guinea; Baga

11 Mende Helmet Mask,
19th–20th century
Sierra Leone, Moyamba
district; Mende or Sherbro

12 Ceremonial Ladle
(*Wunkirmian* or *Wake mia*),
Artist: Zlan, before 1960
Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire; We/Dan

13 Pair of Figures,
19th–20th century
Côte d'Ivoire; Baule

14 Linguist Staff
(*Okyeamepoma*),
19th–20th century
Ghana; Akan, Asante

15 Memorial Head,
19th–20th century
Ghana; Akan

16 Buffalo (*Bocio*),
19th century
Republic of Benin; Fon

17 Figure (*Bocio*),
19th–early 20th century
Republic of Benin; Fon

18 Veranda Post: Equestrian,
before 1938
Artist: Olowe of Ise
(ca. 1873–1938)
Nigeria, Ekiti region; Yoruba

19 Helmet Mask (Gelede),
ca. 1930–71
Artists: Fagbite Asamu of Idahin
and Falola Edun
Republic of Benin,
Ketu region; Yoruba

20 Head of an Oba,
ca. 1550
Nigeria, kingdom of Benin;
Edo peoples

21 Pendant Mask,
16th century
Nigeria, kingdom of Benin; Edo peoples

22 Plaque: Oba on Horseback,
ca. 1550–1680
Nigeria, kingdom of Benin; Edo peoples

23 Shrine (*Ifiri*),
19th–20th century
Nigeria, Niger Delta region; Western Ijo

24 Janus-Faced Headdress,
19th–20th century
Nigeria, Cross River region; Ejagham, Akparabong clan

25 Figure of a Chief (*Lefem*),
19th–20th century
Cameroon; Bangwa

26 Palm-Wine Container,
19th–20th century
Cameroon; Grassfields

27 Reliquary Figure (N*lo Byeri*),
19th–20th century
Gabon; Fang

28 Crucifix,
16th–early 17th century
Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola; Kongo

29 Seated Figure (*Tumba*),
19th–20th century
Democratic Republic of Congo; Kongo, Bambona

30 Power Figure (N*kisi nkondi*),
19th century
Democratic Republic of Congo; Kongo

31 Chair (N*gumdja*),
19th–20th century
Angola; Chokwe

32 Mask,
19th–20th century
Democratic Republic of Congo; Yaka

33 Prestige Panel,
19th–20th century
Democratic Republic of Congo; Kuba

34 Stool,
late 19th century
Attributed to the Buli Master
Democratic Republic of Congo; Luba

35 Harp,
19th–20th century
Democratic Republic of Congo; Mangbetu

36 Apron (*Ijogolo*),
19th–20th century
South Africa; Ndebele

37 Page from an Illuminated Gospel ("The Ascension"),
early 15th century
Ethiopia, Lake Tana region

38 Textile Mantle (*Lamba Mpanjaka*),
1998
Martin Rakotoarimanana (b. 1963)
Madagascar; Malagasy (Merina)

39 Untitled Portrait,
1956–57, printed 1995
Seydou Keïta (1923–2001)
Bamako, Mali

40 Untitled (Vessel),
1997
Magdalene Odundo (b. 1950)

1 Seated Figure, 13th century; ca. 1235
Mali, Inland Niger Delta region
Terracotta; H. 10 in. (25.4 cm)
Purchase, Buckeye Trust and Mr. and Mrs. Milton Rosenthal Gifts, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest and Harris Brisbane Dick and Rogers Funds, 1981 (1981.218)

Among the earliest known examples of art from sub-Saharan Africa are terracotta figures like this one from the inland delta of the Niger River, near the present-day home of the Dogon and Bamana peoples. In this region of Mali, the ancient city of Jenne-jeno ("Old Jenne") flourished as a center for agriculture, trade, and art from the middle of the first millennium until about 1600. The terracotta figures associated with this civilization represent men and women, singular and in pairs, in a variety of attire and poses, including sitting, kneeling, and on horseback. The diversity of imagery and the skill with which they were modeled reveal the rich sculptural heritage of a sophisticated urban culture.

This figure sits, hunched over, with both arms clasping an upraised leg, its head tilted sideways to rest against its bent knee. The posture evokes a pensive attitude that is reinforced by the expressiveness of the facial features: the bulging eyes, large ears, and protruding mouth are all stylistically characteristic of works from this region. The fluid contours of the body emphasize the long sweeping curve of the neck and back and the rhythmic play of intertwined limbs. Except for the barest suggestion of shoulder blades, fingers, and toes, the figure lacks anatomical details. On the back are three rows of raised marks and two rows of marks punched into the clay. These have been variously interpreted as scarification marks or symptoms of a disease.

Thermoluminescence tests indicate that this figure was fired during the first half of the thirteenth century. Other terracotta figures recovered (and, in many cases, looted) from various sites throughout the Inland Niger Delta have been dated from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. Artists—either men or women—modeled the figures by hand, using clay mixed with grog (crushed **potsherds**). Details of dress, jewelry, and body ornament were either added on or incised. Once complete, the work was polished, covered with a reddish-toned clay slip, and then fired, probably in an open-pit kiln. The surviving figures vary in style and subject matter, suggesting that the sculptors had considerable artistic freedom.

Our understanding of the use and meaning of such works remains speculative. A few controlled archaeological digs have revealed similar figures that were originally set into the walls of houses. Oral history collected recently in the region supports the archaeological evidence, as the figures are said to have been venerated in special sanctuaries and private homes. There is little consensus, however, on the meaning of the various forms of the terracotta figures. Scholars have suggested that this figure conveys an attitude of mourning. Its seated pose, shaved head, and lack of dress recall mourning **custom**s still practiced by some in this region of western Africa.

Discussion Questions

1. What shapes are repeated in the figure's outlines and details? Is there more than one? Explain.
2. Why do you think the artist chose to make this figure out of clay instead of wood or stone?
3. What does the figure's pose express?
4. What draws your eye to the face? How would you describe the expression?

2 Ritual Container (A*dun koro*), 16th–19th century
Mali; Dogon
Wood; L. 93 in. (236.22 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.255)

The Dogon call this monumental receptacle, carved from a single block of wood, the *adun koro*, or "ark of the world." The flat-bottomed, rectangular box with a hollowed-out interior is used during annual harvest rituals to hold offerings to the spiritual world. This type of vessel has been interpreted by art historians as a representation of the mythic ark central to Dogon accounts of genesis.

According to some accounts, the Creator Amma sent the mythic ark down from heaven to populate the world. Inside the vessel were the eight original ancestors equipped with everything essential to life on earth. The ark was guided from heaven by Nommo, a primordial being who was transformed into a horse upon the ark's landing. The horse's head and tail, sculpted on the ends of this vessel, suggest Nommo's role as leader and subsequent earthly transformation. The eight original ancestors may be depicted here as a series of **stylized** squatting figures, carved in relief on the side of the container. They are represented in two groups of four, separated by a schematic animal, possibly a lizard.

The Dogon live in remote villages, sheltered by the steep cliffs that stretch 125 miles parallel to the Niger River. The **environment** is particularly harsh, and Dogon farmers struggle to provide food for their families in this dry terrain. A successful harvest is therefore a time of celebration and the giving of thanks.

Each year during winter solstice, after the millet is reaped, lineages (extended families) participate in a ritual known as *goru*. The word *goru* is defined as humidity, richness, and abundance, all of which are seen by the Dogon as blessings from the spiritual world. In order to show gratitude to the ancestors and to Amma the Creator, the head of a lineage offers pieces of goat and sheep meat as sacrifices to the family altar. These offerings are dramatically presented in the *adun koro*, the monumental container that evokes the mythic "ark of the world."

Discussion Questions

1. What details on this rectangular box suggest a narrative?
2. Why is the Dogon myth of the "ark of the world" appropriate for thanksgiving celebrations?
3. Consider the concept of *goru* (humidity, richness, and abundance). Given the climate and area in which the Dogon live, why would *goru* be seen as a blessing from the spiritual world?
4. How did the carver enrich the surfaces of the container? What patterns and shapes are repeated?

3 Mask and Hood (K*anaga*), 19th–20th century
Mali; Dogon
Wood, fiber (sanseveria), hide, pigment; L. 22 13/16 in. (57.9 cm)
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1987 (1987.74h,i)

Dogon masks, such as this one called *kanaga*, are worn primarily at *dama*, a collective funerary rite for Dogon men. The ritual's goal is to ensure the safe passage of the spirits of the deceased to the world of the ancestors. The ceremony is organized by members of Awa, a male initiation society with ritual and political roles within Dogon society. As part of the public rites related to death and remembrance, Awa society members are responsible for the creation and performance of the masks.

Like other Dogon wooden masks, *kanaga* masks depict the face as a rectangular box with deeply hollowed channels for the eyes. The superstructure above the face identifies this mask as a *kanaga*: a double-barred cross with short vertical elements projecting from the ends of the horizontal bars. This abstract form has been interpreted on two levels: literally, as a representation of a bird, and, on a more esoteric level, as a symbol of the creative force of god and the arrangement of the universe. In the latter interpretation, the upper crossbar represents the sky and the lower one, the earth.

This *kanaga* mask was collected complete with some of its costume elements. Attached to the wooden face mask is a hood composed of plaited fiber strips dyed black and yellow with a short fiber fringe that covers the dancer's head. A ruff of red and yellow fibers frames the face. The dancer also wore a black vest woven of fiber and embroidered with white cowry shells and fiber armbands at the wrists and elbows. This ensemble included a long skirt of loosely strung, curly black fibers and a short overskirt composed of straight red and yellow fibers, worn over trousers.

More than eighty different types of masks, of both wood and fiber, have been documented in *dama* performances. They represent various human characters familiar to the Dogon community, such as hunters, warriors, healers, women, and people from neighboring ethnic groups. The masks may also depict animals, birds, objects, and abstract concepts.

Because preparations are elaborate and costly, the *dama* may be held several years after the death and burial of an individual. Performances take place over a six-day period, culminating with a procession of masked dancers who escort the souls of the dead from the village, where they might cause harm, to their final resting place in the spiritual realm. The ceremony recalls the origins of the Dogon people, while also marking the end of the mourning period for the recently deceased. Today, such masks continue to be worn at *dama* performances but are also danced on other, more secular occasions, such as national holidays and as demonstrations organized for the benefit of tourists.

Discussion Questions

1. Look closely at the mask. Can you identify the different materials used? What are they?
2. What is the overall shape of the mask? What forms are repeated?
3. How would you describe the expression?
4. What could the stylized crossbars on the top of the mask symbolize?

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

4 Mother and Child (Gwandusu), 15th–20th century
Mali; Bamana
Wood; H. 48 5/8 in. (123.5 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.121)

Seated Male with Lance (Gwantigi), 15th–20th century
Mali; Bamana
Wood; H. 35 3/8 in. (89.9 cm)
Gift of the Kronos Collection in honor of Martin Lerner, 1983 (1983.600a,b)

The large, naturalistic figures of a woman and man shown here are associated with Jo, a society of initiated Bamana men and women found primarily in southern Mali, near the towns of Bougouni and Dioila. They are also used in Gwan, a division of Jo concerned with women's fertility and childbirth. Now displayed together in the Museum's collection, each of these figures originally came from a different community where they were paired with mates of their own size.

Each of these works embodies complementary Bamana ideals of physical beauty and moral character. The seated mother with child is referred to as Gwandusu, a name evoking strength, passion, and conviction. It combines Gwan, the name of the organization itself that also means hot, hard, or difficult, and *dusu*, which translates as soul, heart, passion, courage, and anger. She is represented as both a nurturing mother and a female with extraordinary powers. Her heavy breasts hold the promise of milk for the child that clings to her abdomen. On her head is a hat decorated with amulets in the form of small animal horns filled with ritual ingredients, and strapped to her left arm is a dagger. Both the knife and hat are commonly associated with powerful male hunters: their representation here underscores the exceptional nature of this ideal woman.

The male figure is called Gwantigi, or "Master of Gwan." He is identified as a hunter and wears an amulet-laden headdress and a dagger on his arm. He is represented seated on a chair, an indication of his status as a leader. The lance he holds in his raised right hand confirms his power and authority.

Jo and Gwan sculptures demonstrate a range of gestures and attributes that suggest a possible link to the terracotta statuary of the Inland Niger Delta region. These two sculptures are probably not the work of the same artist, although they are quite similar stylistically. Note their long, massive torsos with wide, arching shoulders, exaggerations of the human figure that emphasize their power. Their faces are thin and tapered, with large, heavy-lidded eyes, a slender nose, and sharply projecting lips. Represented as archetypes of humanity, they embody Bamana ideals of male and female social roles that, while distinct, are considered equally important in Bamana society.

Jo and Gwan sculptures are cared for by senior members of the associations and displayed as part of a sculptural ensemble during annual festivals. Prior to

their public presentation, the sculptures are cleaned, oiled, and adorned with clothing. Annual displays organized by Jo typically involve only a pair of male and female figures. Those of the Gwan association are more elaborate, and may include up to seven figures in their grouping. Impressive in size and infrequently displayed, the sculptures evoke wonder during their annual presentations and are described by some Bamana as "extraordinary and marvelous things."

The wood from which these sculptures are carved has been dated as early as the fifteenth century by radiocarbon analysis, which measures the amount of radioactive decay of carbon found in organic material. Wood is a perishable medium subject to damage in a warm, moist climate or by the ravages of insects. The unusually well preserved condition of the figures is largely due to the arid conditions of the region in which they were found.

Discussion Questions

1. What features suggest the mother's power and strength?
2. What do her large breasts symbolize about her role as a mother? How do we know she will protect her child?
3. What symbols of power and status does the male figure possess?
4. Although these figures were not made to be a pair, what features do they share? Why might you think they were made by the same group of carvers?

5 Male and Female Antelope Headdresses (C*i wara kun*), 19th–20th century
Mali, Segou region; Bamana
Wood, metal bands; 1978.412.435: H. 35 3/4 in. (90.8 cm); 1978.412.436: H. 28 in. (71.1 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1964 (1978.412.435, 1978.412.436)

Pairs of carved wooden headdresses in the form of antelopes, like these examples, refer to the mythic culture hero Ci Wara, a divine force conceived of as half man and half antelope. Bamana oral traditions credit Ci Wara with introducing to humanity agricultural methods and an understanding of earth, animals, and plants. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ci Wara was invoked and honored by members of a men's agricultural association, also called *ci wara*, in village-wide performances that celebrated the skills of successful farmers. These performances featured a pair of dancers wearing sculpted headdresses, one representing a male antelope and the other a female. They held sticks in their hands to paw the earth just as the mythic Ci Wara did when he first taught men to plant seeds. (See video of *ci wara* performances on the enclosed DVD.)

In performance, the paired dancers symbolize the union between men and women, essential for the continuity of the community. The formal features of the headdress also reference elements of nature necessary to sustain life. The male serves as a metaphor for the sun, while the female is associated with the earth. The long strands of raffia fibers attached to the headdress, concealing the dancer, are likened to streams of water.

Although *ci wara* headdresses are generally described as representing antelopes, they incorporate features of other animals, including aardvarks and pangolins. These animals are selected for their symbolic value. In this pair, the horns and long, arched neck represent the antelope, associated with grace and strength. The head with a long, pointed nose and the low-slung body are features of the aardvark, admired for its determination in digging. The sculpted headdress is attached to a basketry skullcap (now missing on these examples) and secured on top of the dancer's head with a cotton strip. The dancer's face would be covered by a semitransparent cloth, and a costume of darkened raffia fiber would cloak the dancer's body.

The silhouette-like nature of sculptural representation is noted for its elegant play of positive and negative space. The male, identified as a roan antelope, is distinguished by its long horns and elaborate openwork mane. The female, representing an oryx antelope, carries a fawn on her back, a reference to human mothers, who carry babies on their backs as they till the fields. The face and horns of both are decorated with delicate chip-carved patterning, incised linear designs, and metal appliqué and strips.

The Bamana, who live in the southern part of present-day Mali, have long considered farming to be among the most noble of all professions. Traditionally,

Bamana farmers have worked arduously in the savanna fields from May to October, when it rains regularly, in order to provide enough food during the long, dry season. Today, despite the significant social changes that have impacted contemporary Bamana experience, farming remains central to their identity. Although many Bamana have adopted Islam over the course of the last century, theatrical *ci wara* dances continue in many Bamana villages, celebrating their agrarian lifestyle. Among the continent's most well-known forms of expression, the elegantly abstract form of the *ci wara* headdress has also been adopted as a national symbol of cultural identity, used as a logo by Mali's official airline and found on the national currency.

Discussion Questions

1. What indicates that the animal forms on these headdresses are not meant to look like real antelopes?
2. Why is an aardvark a good metaphor for the activities of a farmer? What might be the purpose of combining several animal features?
3. How can you tell which is the female antelope? Why?
4. What shapes and patterns are repeated in this pair? Note the shapes made by the voids as well as the solids (positive and negative space).

6 Komo Headdress (*Komokunw*), 19th–20th century
Mali; Bamana
Wood, bird skull, horns, cloth, porcupine quill, sacrificial material; L. 33 3/4 in. (85.6 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.150)

This headdress was made and used by a member of the Komo society, an association of blacksmiths found among the Bamana and other Mande-speaking communities in the region. Komo association members enforce community laws, make judicial decisions, and offer protection from illness, misfortune, and malevolent forces. The headdress embodies the secret knowledge and awesome power of the society; its rough and unattractive form is therefore intended to be visually intimidating. While works like the Bamana maternity figure (image 4) depict a human ideal, this headdress is explicitly about harnessing the forces of untamed nature, a concept expressed visually in its form and material.

The wooden structure of the headdress has a domed head, gaping mouth, and long horns. Attached are antelope horns, a bird skull with a sharp beak, and porcupine quills, elements chosen for their metaphorical associations since they provide animals with power and protection. The animals themselves hold symbolic value in Bamana culture. Birds, for example, are associated with wisdom and divinatory powers, while porcupines signify the importance of preserving knowledge. The mask was further enhanced by the application of ritual substances formed from a mixture of earth, sacrificial animal blood, and medicinal plants. This material was replenished on a regular basis, endowing the mask with the critical life force, or *nyama*, that is the source of its extraordinary power.

Komo society headdresses are made by blacksmiths, a specialized artisan group among the Bamana whose profession is inherited. Blacksmiths are greatly respected within their community for the special knowledge and technical skills that allow them to use fire, water, and air to transform iron ore into tools and weapons. Ironworking is considered an especially dangerous profession, one that requires courage and extraordinary abilities to manage the potentially destructive spiritual forces released during the process. Blacksmiths are therefore uniquely qualified to create Komo headdresses, which combine terrifying forms and inherently harmful materials in an object of benefit to the community.

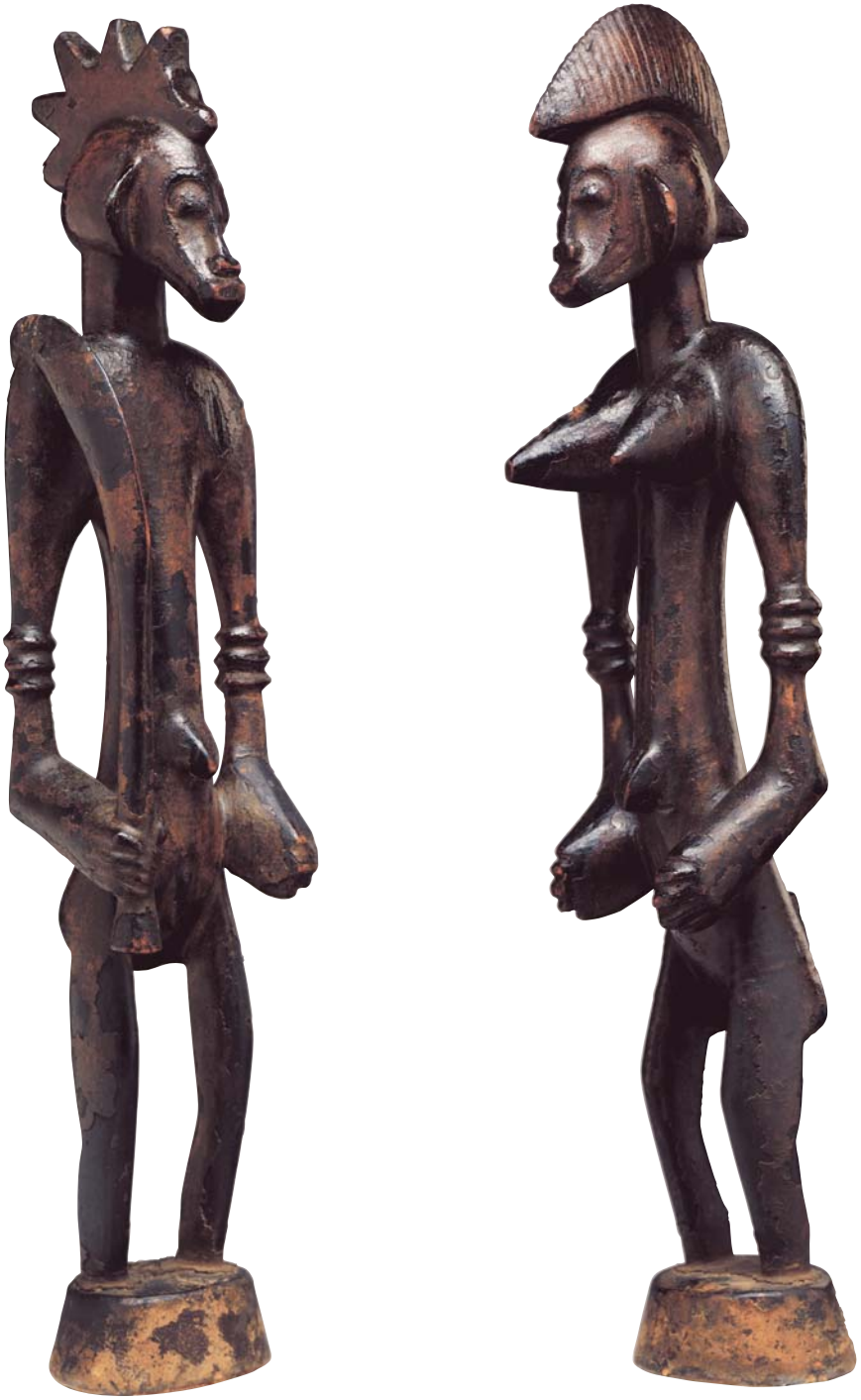
The headdress is worn in dramatic performances that serve as a focal point of Komo society meetings. Held in private and restricted to initiated members, these meetings provide an opportunity to gain an understanding of the society's history, beliefs, and rituals. Accompanied by bards and musicians, a high-ranking Komo member appears wearing a headdress like this strapped on the top of his head. His face is covered with a semitransparent cloth and he wears a costume of black feathers enhanced with amulets over a hooped skirt. The dancer's performance is acrobatic and intense, featuring spectacular feats that suggest extraordinary powers. His performance responds to petitions for assistance from members of

the community. Through song and dance, the Komo member gradually reveals solutions to a variety of concerns that have been presented to him, from crop failure to infertility.

Considered the most powerful of men's associations in the region, Komo has an ancient history and was well established by the time the Mali empire rose to power in the thirteenth century. Individual community branches of Komo, which are distributed widely across the region, gain authority through strong leadership, coalitions with wilderness spirits, and effective use of power objects.

Discussion Questions

1. What materials were used to create this mask? What is the overall visual effect?
2. What actual animal parts have been added? How do animals use these features?
3. The sharp projections and rough surfaces were deliberately made to evoke what kind of reaction?



7 Ancestral Couple (P*ombibele*), 19th–20th century
Côte d'Ivoire, Korhogo region; Senufo
Wood, pigment; H. male, 23 1/2 in. (59.7 cm); H. female, 23 7/10 in. (60.2 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979
(1979.206.193,194)

The Senufo are a diverse people who have varied cultural backgrounds and speak different **dialect**s. Nonetheless, they share a central social institution—Poro—to which all men belong. Within a Senufo community, each occupational group—farmers, traders, artisans—has its own Poro chapter. Poro supervises the initiation of adolescent boys and provides continuing social and political guidance to its members. Members of its female counterpart, the Sandogo association, are diviners whose responsibilities include the maintenance of good relations with the spiritual world. Together, the men's and women's societies work to ensure the physical and spiritual well-being of the community.

This male and female pair, representing an ideal Senufo man and woman, commemorate the original ancestors of the Senufo account of creation. Poro's leadership commissions such figural pairs for display to reinforce social teachings during initiation ceremonies. The figures are also displayed at funerals of important Poro elders, a time of community grief and loss. Embodying Senufo beliefs concerning order and continuity, the figures remind the living of the importance of preserving connections with past generations.

Similar in form, the figures stand erect, legs slightly flexed and facing forward, with large ears cocked forward and jutting chin. Their elongated columnar torsos are framed by broad curving shoulders from which attenuated arms extend fluidly, swelling into blocky hands. Both the frontal poses and the exaggerations of human anatomy visualize ideas about power, determination, and vitality. The extended navels refer to an awareness of the wisdom of the ancestors and, in the case of the female figure, also stress the role of women in the continuity of human life. The figures' eyes are nearly closed, as if in meditation, a reference to the inner strength they possess.

The male figure carries a scythe, a symbol that he is the farmer and provider. The woman's exaggerated conical breasts and swelling belly indicate that she bears and nurtures children. The man's extraordinary headdress, the woman's equally impressive **coiffure**, their facial scarification and body adornments signify their high status. Together, they reflect the complementary social roles of men and women in Senufo culture.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the pose (slightly bent knees, arms bent at the elbows, and jutting chin) suggest? Try taking this pose and describe what it feels like.
2. In what ways are ideal male and female roles expressed visually through this pair of figures?
3. Despite the differences in these two figures, how does the artist visually communicate that they are a pair? Consider symmetry, scale, and style.

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

8 Mask (N*wantantay*), 19th–20th century
Burkina Faso; Bwa
Wood, pigment, fiber; H. 72 in. (182.9 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1964 (1978.412.306)

Among the southern Bwa peoples in Burkina Faso, large wooden plank masks are carved to represent various flying spirits that inhabit the natural world. These spirits, though largely invisible, are associated with water and can take physical form as insects that gather around a pool after a heavy rain or as a large water fowl, like an ibis. Some Bwa describe a mythological encounter in which a flying spirit appeared before a human, offering protection and service. A tall plank mask was created after this encounter to honor the spirit and ensure its continued beneficence.

This mask has a circular face and tall, vertical superstructure with a series of downward-curving hooks projecting from both the front and the back. The protruding, diamond-shaped mouth with jagged teeth is pierced to allow the wearer to see. Brightly painted patterns in red, black, and white enhance the bold geometric shape of the plank. These designs refer to important Bwa ideals of social and moral behavior that are taught over the course of initiation. Each symbol has multiple levels of meaning that older initiates reveal gradually to novices as they mature. The checkerboard pattern of black and white squares, for example, refers on one level to the animal skins on which people sit: white representing the clean, fresh hides assigned to youths and black suggesting the darkened skins owned by elders. On a less literal level, the juxtaposition of white and black squares suggests abstract concepts such as the separation of good from evil, and of light from dark.

N*wantantay* masks are part of diverse ensembles of masks that represent animals, insects, humans, and supernatural creatures. The masks are commissioned and owned by large, extended families, or clans. The masks are used on several occasions throughout the year, including initiations, burials, annual renewal rites associated with planting and harvesting, and ceremonies celebrating the consecration of a new mask. These events are often competitive, with individual clans striving to present the most elaborate and inventive performance in the community.

The mask is worn by a skilled dancer who secures it over his face by gripping a fiber rope on the mask's back with his teeth. His body is concealed by a bushy fiber costume, traditionally dyed red or black, but now also seen in the bright green, yellow, and purple of European dyes. Accompanied by musicians playing flutes and drums and women singing songs, the masquerader moves rapidly, imitating the behavior of a flying spirit. With fiber costume twirling, he twists back and forth, then dips low to the ground, rotating the mask to suggest a disembodied apparition.

The tradition of carving and performing wooden masks is a recent one among the southern Bwa, adopted within the past hundred years from the neighboring Nunuma and Winiama peoples. Previously, the Bwa had created masks of leaves, vines, and grasses for use in ceremonies honoring Do, the earthly representative of the creator god. Resulting from the constant interplay of people and ideas, this example of cultural borrowing demonstrates the dynamism of masking traditions in the region and, in particular, the openness to innovation and adaptation that characterizes Bwa culture.

Discussion Questions

1. What geometric forms and patterns do you see in this mask? What human and animal features do you recognize?
2. The painted designs and patterns convey ideas of social order and moral behavior. What could the contrast between black and white symbolize?

9 Lidded Saltcellar, 15th–16th century
Sierra Leone; Sapi-Portuguese
Ivory; H. 11 3/4 in. (29.8 cm)
Gift of Paul and Ruth W. Tishman, 1991 (1991.435a,b)

This magnificent lidded ivory saltcellar was carved by a Sapi sculptor working in what is now Sierra Leone. This work is part of a group of ivory artifacts created during the earliest period of exchange between Africans living south of the Sahara and Europeans. During the second half of the fifteenth century, journeys of exploration brought Portuguese navigators into direct contact with cultures of coastal western Africa. At a number of coastal centers in present-day Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau, as well as Nigeria and Democratic Republic of Congo, the travelers encountered African carvers of considerable talent and professional skill. They commissioned African works in ivory for export as souvenirs of their travels or as gifts for the European nobility who financed their voyages. Many of the artifacts entered European princely collections, formed as cabinets of curiosities. These works, whose African origins had been forgotten until recent art historical research unearthed them, have come to be known as Afro-Portuguese ivories.

At the time, salt was rare and therefore very expensive in Europe. To be able to display this precious commodity in such a finely carved and elaborately detailed vessel was a symbol of wealth and prestige at the table of a wealthy Portuguese. Local artists are believed to have been shown European prototypes on which to base their creations. This vessel's form and some elements of its decoration recall European saltcellars. For example, an acorn nestled inside the stylized petals of a rose crowns the top of the container, while four rosettes carved in relief surround the upper part of the lid. Most of the designs, however, are distinctly African, reflecting Sapi artistic sensibilities. Four figures wearing local dress are sculpted around the base. Two are warriors bearing swords and shields, and two are women. Above them, curving around the disk of ivory, are four delicately carved snakes that drop down toward four dogs represented in a state of alarm with bared fangs, drawn-back ears, and bristling fur.

Although the Sapi peoples have dispersed to other locales since the sixteenth century, traditions associated with contemporary peoples related to the Sapi, notably the Baga, provide insights into the meaning of such imagery. In Baga belief, snakes are identified with local water spirits, called Niniganné. The Niniganné are described as powerful beings with long, smooth hair and brilliant scales. They are believed to be capable of spanning two realms—the earthly and the spiritual—and are associated with waterways, wealth (in the form of clothing and metal), and danger. These attributes coincide with Sapi perceptions of the Portuguese seafarers, whose flowing hair and unusual attire may be compared to descriptions of Niniganné. Like the water spirits, the Portuguese visitors were regarded as powerful individuals with mystical abilities who traveled across the

water bringing great riches, in the form of trade. They also brought danger, since, beginning as early as 1512, the Portuguese king required that ships returning from Africa be laden with slaves.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the artist achieve balance and symmetry? Are there design details in one area that are repeated in another? Explain.
2. What surface designs emphasize the three-dimensional shapes of the saltcellar?
3. Why would this object be highly valued in a Portuguese household? Think about the materials, the appearance, and where it was made.
4. It is believed that the people who created this object associated snakes with Niniganné, a local water spirit. Why might snakes be appropriate decoration for an object created for Portuguese merchants traveling by sea?

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

10 Headdress (D'mba or Yamban), 19th–20th century
Guinea; Baga
Wood; H. 46 1/2 in. (118.1 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.17)

This massive headdress is an example of a regional artistic tradition that dates to at least 1886 and possibly to the early seventeenth century. Among Baga subgroups the headdress is referred to variously as D'mba or Yamban, an abstract concept personifying local ideals of female power, goodness, and social comportment.

Carved from a single piece of wood, this work takes the form of a large head and slender neck supported by a yoke with four projecting legs. Flat, pendulous breasts signify that the subject is a mature woman who has nursed many children. She is distinguished from ordinary Baga by her intricately braided coiffure with high central crest, a hairstyle associated with Fulbe women, who are renowned for their physical beauty. This coiffure is also a reminder of cultural origins, as the Fulbe live in the Futa Jallon mountains, the ancestral homeland of the Baga people. Incised linear patterns representing scarification marks decorate her face, neck, and breasts. Such monumental structures, carried on the shoulders of the performer, often weigh more than eighty pounds. In its original context, the headdress would have had a thick raffia skirt attached to the bottom of the yoke. A shawl of dark cotton cloth, imported from Europe, would be tied around the shoulders, hiding the legs of the yoke.

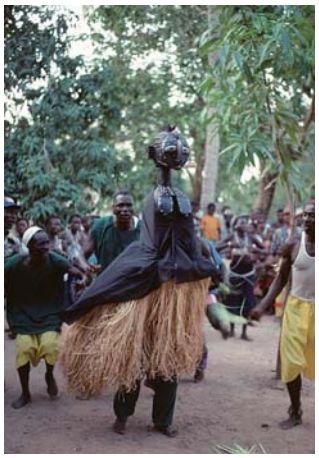


Fig. 1. A D'mba or Yamban headdress danced by Vincent Bangoura as part of a Baga celebration. Photograph by Frederick Lamp, 1990.

The ideals of womanhood expressed symbolically by the strong forms of the headdress are reinforced by the movement of the male dancer, who communicates a model of virtuous behavior for Baga women (fig.1). Performances documented in the 1990s describe the dramatic entrance of the masquerader in a central plaza, preceded by a processional line of drummers. Despite its unwieldy size, the headdress is manipulated skillfully by the dancer, whose movements are alternately composed and vigorous. As the dancer twirls to the accompaniment of drums, the assembled audience of male and female onlookers participates actively. Some reach to touch the breasts of the headdress, affirming its blessings of fertility, while others throw rice, symbolizing agricultural bounty. Songs prescribing proper social behavior are led by women who are joined in the chorus by men. Beginning at sunrise, the celebration continues through sundown and sometimes over the course of many days.

Historically, such masks were used in dances held at planting times and harvest celebrations, as well as at marriages, funerals, and ceremonies in honor of special guests. Following Guinea's independence from France in 1958 and its adoption of a Marxist government, the tradition was suppressed by Muslim leaders and state officials. In the 1990s, the lifting of decades of censorship was followed by a popular revival of earlier art forms. In Baga society, D'mba (or

Yamban) now appears publicly on occasions marking personal and communal growth, including marriages, births, and harvest festivals, as well as celebratory occasions such as soccer tournaments.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the signs of status and beauty the Baga people would immediately recognize on this mask?
2. The large head, eyes, and nose symbolize what desirable characteristics?
3. Consider the large size of this headdress. What skills would the performer of this mask need in order to move slowly and then quickly?
4. Look at the female features that are emphasized by the artist. What characteristics do you think were important to the Baga?

11 Mende Helmet Mask, 19th–20th century
Sierra Leone, Moyamba district; Mende or Sherbro
Wood, metal; H. 18 7/8 in. (47.9 cm)
Gift of Robert and Nancy Nooter, 1982 (1982.389)

This helmet mask reveals the hand of a master through its refined carving, harmonious design, and innovative elements. Within Mende and Sherbro culture, helmet masks are carved with symbolic features intended to endow the wearer with spiritual power. Senior members of two distinct initiation societies, Sande and Humui, may have worn this work in performances.

Sande is a powerful pan-ethnic women's association responsible for the education and moral development of young girls. Helmet masks of this kind represent its guardian spirit and allude to an idealized female beauty. Historically, the Sande initiation process took months to complete, yet today sessions are coordinated with the calendars of secondary schools and may be completed during vacations and holidays. Such masks are worn by initiated Sande women at performances that celebrate the completion of the young initiates' training period. The masks are finely carved to convey admired feminine features: an elaborate coiffure, a smooth, broad forehead, narrowly slit eyes, a small, composed mouth, and a sensuously ringed neck. This composition of forms and symmetry creates a serene facial expression that implies self-control. The presence of a beard, a symbol synonymous with the wisdom men achieve with age and experience, may suggest that, through Sande, women attain knowledge equal to men. Directly below the curve of the beard are two slots through which the performer can see.

The mask's glossy black patina evokes the beauty of clean, healthy, oiled skin. It may also refer to the blackness of the river bottom, where the Sande spirit is believed to reside. In this interpretation, the ringed neck may refer to the circular ripples of water that are formed as the Sande spirit emerges from her watery realm.

In Humui, a medicine society for men and women, this type of helmet mask has been used to address curative needs, especially mental illness. The four projecting animal-horn amulets that rise from the perimeter may be a reference to the animal horns filled with protective medicinal ingredients worn by Humui members.

? Discussion Questions

1. What might the four horns symbolize?
2. What ideals do the facial features express?
3. Why the beard?

12 Ceremonial Ladle (*Wunkirmian* or *Wake mia*), before 1960
Artist: Zlan
Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire; We/Dan
Wood, fiber, metal, pigment; L. 23 in. (58.4 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.254)

Among the We and neighboring Dan peoples, large, sculpted ladles like this one are created to honor women known as *wunkirle*, a title earned through their exceptional generosity and hospitality. This title is bestowed upon one woman from each village quarter who has demonstrated outstanding abilities as an industrious farmer, a bountiful provider of food, and a gracious host. The chosen woman is expected to offer hospitality to all who come to her door at the great celebrations that occur before the planting season begins. As *wunkirle*, she leads a procession of women carrying pots of cooked rice and soup and directs the distribution of the food to all the guests in attendance. Her duties also include hosting itinerant bands of musicians and entertainers as well as later providing food for men who toil in the fields during the planting season.

Such ladles are carved as an emblem of honor for a particular *wunkirle* and are typically passed on to the successor she selects to replace her. According to We belief, these ceremonial ladles embody a spiritual force, called *dü*, which sustains the *wunkirle*'s exceptional abilities to organize feasts, bringing her great fame and social status. Women who have been honored as *wunkirle* often accompany male dancers wearing masks in performances. Bearing their ladles in hand, the women dance with the masker, offering gifts and blessings.

This ladle takes the form of a long, scooplike bowl surmounted by a handle in the shape of a female head. It is attributed to the artist Zlan, a master carver active during the first half of the twentieth century. The face, sculpted in a style characteristic of Zlan's work, features slit eyes, a generous mouth with four metal-tab teeth, and a line of delicately incised scarification from forehead to nose. White kaolin clay around the eyes and extending to the sides represents the band of white kaolin clay that Dan women often apply cosmetically to symbolize the heightened powers of sight one must possess to be aware of the spiritual realm. A carved coiffure of two large crescents extending front to back is embellished with plaited fiber along the central ridges. On such ladles, the sculpted head is believed to be a portrait of the original owner of the ladle, whose individuality is conveyed through details of specific scarification and coiffure design features, rather than physical likeness.

Zlan's work was much sought after by wealthy patrons in Dan, Mano, and We villages in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. The son of a carver, Zlan was born around the turn of the twentieth century in a We town on the River Cess, which forms a border between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. Zlan's early demonstration of artistic talent was recognized and encouraged by his mother, who gave him his first adze. He secured his first commission for a sculpture around the age of thirteen and

eventually gained widespread recognition for his masterful carvings, many of which now grace museum collections in the United States and Europe. Until his death sometime before 1960, Zlan served as a mentor to many students during their apprenticeship, establishing his village of Belewale as a major center of carving. According to the recollections of locals, Zlan was often assisted in carving by his wife Sonzlanwon, who blocked out forms in the wood for Zlan to finish. The tradition of carving has continued in Zlan's family, at least through the late 1980s, carried on by his nephews Wrudugweh and Blekwa as well as a niece, Ziate.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is a ladle decorated with a female face an appropriate way to recognize a woman's hospitality? Describe her expression.
2. Discuss the meaning and function of this ladle.
3. What details indicate that this ladle belonged to a woman of high status in her society?
4. Identify the materials the carver added to the wood.

13 Pair of Figures, 19th–20th century
Côte d'Ivoire; Baule
Wood, pigment, beads, iron; H. male, 21 3/16 in. (55.4 cm); H. female, 20 2/3 in. (52.5 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1969
(1978.412.390,.391)

Carved by the same hand, these figures reflect and embody Baule ideals of civilized beauty. In Baule society, diviners commission such figures from artists to attract the attention of *asye usu*, or nature spirits. A*sye usu* are considered to be grotesque and volatile beings associated with the untamed elements of nature. The spirits are seduced from the wilderness by the figures' dazzling beauty and lured into inhabiting the sculptures, which embody the civilized values the *asye usu* lack and therefore find so desirable. The *asye usu* are then induced into sharing spiritual insights, conveyed through the medium of the diviner.

Fig. 2. Katake, a trance diviner (*komien*), in his shrine with figures displayed behind him. Photograph by Susan Vogel, 1997.

Such figures are prominently displayed during ritual sessions with clients who seek clarification about their difficulties, which can range from poor harvests to physical illness. The presence of the sculptures and the sacrificial material applied to their feet (never to the smooth surfaces of their bodies), along with repeated striking of a gong, help to induce the trance state that allows the diviner to communicate with the *asye usu*. The diviner can then gain insights and revelations regarding the source of the client's problems. The ownership of such extraordinary works also serves to further the professional standing of the diviner, who must impress potential clients with the caliber and sophistication of the instruments used in his or her practice (fig. 2).

Although depicted separately, the male and female figures are perfectly harmonized through their matched forms, gestures, stances, and expressions. Their elaborate coiffures, intricate scarification, and beaded accoutrements signify cultural refinement and status. Their erect, balanced pose and partially closed eyes imply respect, self-control, and serenity. The fully rounded muscles of their flexed legs suggest physical strength, youthful energy, and the potential for action. White kaolin accentuates the elegant arches of their eyebrows, reflecting the practice of diviners, who apply the fine clay around their eyes to facilitate communication with the spirits.

Discussion Questions

1. How can you tell that these figures were carved by the same hand? What suggests they are meant to be a pair?
2. How are the couple's status and refinement shown? What features suggest their self-control?
3. What forms show strength and imply movement?
4. Why might these figures be attractive to powerful nature spirits, who are considered to be wild and grotesque?
5. Discuss the function of these figures and what they represented to the Baule.

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

14 Linguist Staff (*Okyeamepoma*), 19th–20th century
Ghana; Akan, Asante
Gold foil, wood, nails; H. 61 5/8 in. (156.5 cm)
Gift of the Richard J. Faletti Family, 1986 (1986.475a-c)

This magnificent gold-covered staff was created to serve as an insignia of office for an *okyeame*, a high-ranking advisor to an Asante ruler. The position of *okyeame* encompasses a broad set of responsibilities, including mediation, judicial advocacy, political troubleshooting, and the preservation and interpretation of royal history. The *okyeame*'s most visible public role is as principal intermediary between the ruler and those who seek his counsel, leading to the popular characterization of his profession as being that of a linguist (fig. 3). Drawing upon vast knowledge and considerable oratorical and diplomatic skills, the *okyeame* eloquently engages in verbal discourse on behalf of the chief and his visitors. He relays the words of visitors to the king and transmits the king's response, often with poetic or metaphorical embellishment.

Fig. 3. Fante linguists holding staffs. Photograph by Herbert Cole, 1974.

Imagery on the finial of linguist staffs typically illustrates Asante proverbs about power and institutional responsibilities. Here, a spider on its web is flanked by two figures, representing the proverb: "No one goes to the house of the spider to teach it wisdom." The spider is a fitting symbol for respect due to a person with great oratorical and diplomatic skills. In Ghana, Ananse the spider is the bringer of the wisdom of Nyame, the supreme creator god of the Asante, and is the originator of folk tales and proverbs. The staff is composed of a long wooden shaft carved in two interlocking sections and a separate finial attached to the base. It is covered entirely with gold foil, a material that alludes to the sun, and to the vital force or soul contained within all living things.

Although the institutional office of *okyeame* is believed to be centuries old, the use of figural wooden linguist staffs as insignia is probably a more recent development. Prior to the late nineteenth century, linguist staffs took the form of a simple cane, a tradition likely borrowed from European prototypes in the mid-seventeenth century. During the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, the British gave official staffs, often made with figural finials, to Akan chiefs who represented the colonial authorities. Since 1900, hundreds of figural linguist staffs have been carved not only for linguists but also for representatives of other institutions, such as associations of fishermen, carpenters, and musicians.

The Asante kingdom, part of the larger Akan culture, was formed around 1700 under the leadership of Osei Tutu. Osei Tutu brought together a confederation of states that had grown wealthy and powerful as a result of the area's lucrative trade in gold, sold to both northern merchants across the Sahara and European navigators. The centralized system of government that emerged was a complex network of chiefs and court officials under a single paramount leader. A variety of gold regalia was used to distinguish rank and position within the court.

Discussion Questions

1. How is your eye directed to the spider? What geometric shapes create the spider's web?
2. What might happen if the two small men move closer to the spider?
3. What is the message to people who approach the linguist with problems? According to Asante folk tales, Ananse the spider brought wisdom to the Akan. Why, then, is a spider an appropriate symbol for a linguist?
4. Describe how the staff was made.

15 Memorial Head, 19th–20th century
Ghana; Akan
Terracotta; H. 12 5/16 in. (31.3 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1964 (1978.412.353)

Since the late sixteenth century, Akan women potters have created ceramic heads and sometimes complete figures to commemorate deceased royals and individuals of high status. During the funeral, family members placed the terracotta portraits of the deceased in a sacred grove near the cemetery, sometimes with representations of other family members. These sculptures served as the focal point for funerary rites in which libations and food were offered to the ancestors.

This example has a rounded face with protruding elliptical eyes that tilt downward and a delicately shaped nose. These circular shapes are repeated by the eyebrows, ears, and open, oval-shaped mouth which projects from the smooth surface of the face. An incised line curves around the forehead, indicating the hairline. The surface of the sculpture has been covered with a clay slip tinted black, a color linked to the ancestral world and spiritual power in Akan thought.

Like other examples of African portraiture, these commemorative sculptures are idealized representations that convey individuality through specifics of scarification and hairstyle. The artist would typically be summoned to the deathbed of the deceased in order to observe his or her distinguishing characteristics, which she would depict later, working from memory to capture the individual's essence. The figural terracotta sculptures vary enormously in style, ranging from fairly naturalistic and sculpturally rounded forms to examples that are solid, flat, and more dramatically stylized.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the expression on this face. In what ways is it appropriate to its use as a memorial?
2. How would surviving members of this individual be able to identify her?
3. What tells us that this head is hollow? Discuss how sculpture like this is formed from clay and fired.

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

16 Buffalo (B*ocio*), 19th century
Republic of Benin; Fon
Silver, iron, wood; H. 12 in. (30.5 cm)
Gift of Anne d'Harnoncourt and Joseph Rishel, in memory of René and Sarah Carr d'Harnoncourt and Nelson A. Rockefeller, 2002 (2002.517.1)

Royal works of art, like this silver buffalo, were made by members of the Huntondji family, who served Fon kings as jewelers and smiths since the eighteenth century. Though small in size, this shimmering silver creature radiates strength and determination. Bulging eyes, bared teeth, black curved horns, cocked ears, and swishing tail create this effect. Its eyes, horns, and tail are made from iron, a material associated with the Fon war god, Gu. The forest buffalo was an emblem of the Fon king Guezo, who ruled Dahomey (modern Republic of Benin) from 1818 until 1858. The qualities associated with a ruler's emblem—in the case of the buffalo, strength, enduring memory, and royal legacy—were seen as defining a king's reign. Although he came to power by usurping the throne of his older brother, Guezo is recalled as an important leader who unified the diverse constituencies of the kingdom.

Symbols of Fon kings were determined in a divination ceremony known as *fa*, which predicted the nature and character of each king's reign. The buffalo emblem is one of 256 different *fa* divination signs, which were represented in a variety of artistic media created to support and enhance the king's authority. Sculptural forms, like this example, in addition to functioning as royal symbols, also served as *bocio*, empowered objects that provided protection to the king. Placed in palace shrines where they served as the focus of prayer, these works were given potency through the presence of powerful substances in their interiors. Royal *bocio* were also displayed during ceremonial processions and transported to battlefields during times of war.

To create this buffalo figure, the sculptor sheathed a solid wooden core with very thin pieces of silver. He tacked these pieces to the surface in individual sheets, creating a patchwork effect. Then he finished the surface with hatching marks to simulate hide and incised vertical lines for the large, bared teeth. The sculptor's technique was a clever one, because silver was a luxury material derived primarily from European coins. The artist's technique of encasing wood in sheet metal maximized the visual effects of a costly material without using the large quantities of metal required for lost-wax casting.

The Fon kingdom of Dahomey, founded in the early seventeenth century, was an important regional power renowned for its strong monarchy, military prowess, and impressive court arts. Dahomey's influence expanded in the eighteenth century with the capture of the port city of Ouidah. From this coastal center, the kingdom participated in lucrative trade with Europeans, growing prosperous first by serving as a middleman in the Atlantic slave trade and, later, by selling palm oil. French colonization and the subsequent abolishment of the institution of kingship led to the fall of Dahomey in the late nineteenth century.

Discussion Questions

1. Why would a king choose a forest buffalo as his symbol?
2. What features of this object evoke the energy and power in this beast?
3. Discuss the function of this object.
4. To create this work of art, the artist sheathed a piece of wood in silver. Can you see how and where the individual pieces are joined together? How does the process contribute to the final visual effect?

17 Figure (B*ocio*), 19th–early 20th century
Republic of Benin; Fon
Wood, bone, metal wire, sacrificial materials; H. 19 1/2 in. (49.5 cm)
Purchase, The Denise and Andrew Saul Philanthropic Fund Gift, 1984 (1984.190)

This bust once served as a protective device, or *bocio*, ensuring its owner's health and well-being, and safeguarding against potential harm. Ending in a pointed stake, it was hammered into the ground. Unlike the sumptuous *bocio* made for Fon kings, this kind of art is prescribed by diviners for use by nonroyal individuals. The carvings are most often made by nonspecialists for their family members and then empowered by a diviner who adds various organic substances. The most powerful *bocio* are made by ritual specialists such as diviners, called *bokonon*, and priests associated with the deities known as *vodun*.

The unrefined carving style and the rough surfaces combine to create an aesthetic of raw energy. The massive head is carved with faces on either side. The larger, more dominant head faces front, its inscrutable gaze and pursed lips suggesting intense concentration. On the other side is a smaller, skull-like face whose otherworldly gaze is accentuated by its asymmetrical, empty eye sockets. The disproportionately large head underscores the centrality of physical perception, while the presence of two sets of eyes suggests a state of heightened vision and watchfulness.

Plant and animal materials give the work supernatural powers. A dog's skull crowns the head, and a garland of serpent bones encircles the neck. Such materials have symbolic significance. The presence of the skull of a dog, an animal praised for its protective skills, reinforces notions of guardianship and surveillance central to the efficacy of this object. Snakes call to mind poisonous attacks.

The resulting work functions proactively as a defense mechanism, responding to the varied needs of its owner. Uses may include the detection of thieves, protection from sorcery, and the manipulation of weather. As a surrogate for the individual who commissioned it, a *bocio* serves as a decoy, drawing harmful forces away from its owner. Operating at the intersection of the spiritual and human realms, *bocio* are strategically situated along paths, roadways, agricultural fields, and near family compounds, or placed inside homes and shrines.

Discussion Questions

1. The diviner added organic materials associated with dogs and snakes to the original form carved from wood. What are the symbolic meanings of these materials for the Fon? Do these animals have similar meanings in other cultures?
2. This sculpture is the result of both a reductive process (the carving of wood) and the accumulation of organic materials. Can you identify areas of each?
3. What does the figure's face express? Is it appropriate for an object whose purpose is to deflect potential harm? How is the figure's power enhanced by the second face on the back?

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

18 Veranda Post: Equestrian, before 1938
Artist: Olowe of Ise (ca. 1873–1938)
Nigeria, Ekiti region; Yoruba
Wood, pigment; H. 71 in. (180.3 cm)
Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1996 (1996.558)

In the early twentieth century, a Yoruba ruler commissioned this architectural column from one of the most renowned sculptors in the history of Yoruba art, Olowe of Ise. Born in the nineteenth century in Efon-Alaiye, a famed carving center, Olowe moved as a youth southeast to Ise. There, his artistic reputation was established when he carved a program of architectural sculptures for its king, the Arinjale. Subsequent commissions of architectural sculpture for the palaces of other regional leaders brought Olowe even greater recognition as a master sculptor. Admired by his contemporaries, Olowe's artistic talent is recalled in *oriki*, or praise poems, composed in his honor. His accomplishments were also recognized in the West. In 1924, a pair of his palace doors was exhibited in London and acquired for the British Museum.

Olowe created this veranda post, one of several, for the exterior courtyard of a Yoruba palace. Carved from one piece of wood, the composition combines two classic Yoruba icons of power and leadership. The most prominent of these is the equestrian warrior, who is depicted frontally sitting regally on a diminutive horse. He holds a spear and a revolver. The image of the mounted warrior symbolizes the military might needed to form kingdoms. Local leaders adopted this image to validate their rule. At the base of the post, the kneeling female figure is depicted as the dominant form. In Yoruba culture, women are honored as the source of human life and embody ideas of spiritual, political, and economic power. These allegorical representations underscore the wealth and power of the ruler who commissioned the work.

Here, as in other examples of African sculpture, proportion and scale are altered and exaggerated to symbolize ideas. The disproportionately large heads represent character, self-control, and motivation. Eyes are large to suggest awareness. Among the Yoruba, the most beautiful people have a gap between their upper front teeth. The woman's exaggerated breasts symbolize her ability to have children and to nurture them. The woman is represented slightly larger than the warrior, suggesting that she is the essential support. The warrior's horse, less important than its rider, is depicted as smaller. The subordinate role of the two youths by the woman's side is suggested by their small scale.

Stylistically, Olowe was very innovative in his composition. He is especially known for the manner in which figures project beyond the immediate boundaries of the sculptural space. Here, instead of the usual Yoruba practice of depicting figures in frontal poses, he sculpted the female figure turning toward the left with the two smaller attendants radiating outward at oblique angles. The compressed style of the upper portion of the column, with its weighty and self-contained equestrian figure, contrasts with the sense of kinetic energy created by the

dynamic composition of multiple figures below. The sculpture's formal complexity is enhanced by its textured surface, with details originally painted in black, white, and royal blue. The deep carving style was well suited to the intense raking sunlight of its original setting just inside an exterior veranda.

The Yoruba, who live in southwestern Nigeria and southern Benin, are a diverse people with a rich cultural and artistic heritage of considerable antiquity. Although they number over 15 million people, the Yoruba embrace an overarching common identity through shared language and history. They trace the origins of both life and civilization to their founding city of Ile-Ife, which was a thriving urban center by the eleventh century. In the centuries that followed, numerous autonomous city-states developed, related through professed descent from Ile-Ife. In general, each city-state was governed by a sacred ruler, whose power was balanced by a council of elders. Artists working for these regional leaders produced a wide range of art forms designed to glorify the status of the king and his court.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the function of this post as one of several supporting a porch in the courtyard leading to the entrance of a Yoruba leader's palace.
2. What ideas about kingship are symbolized by the warrior and the woman supporting him?
3. Which of the two main figures is more important? Or are they both important symbols? Explain.
4. What makes this post interesting from more than one point of view?
5. Discuss Olowe and his skill in carving this column out of one large tree trunk.

19 Helmet Mask (Gelede), ca. 1930–71
Artists: Fagbite Asamu of Idahin and Falola Edun
Republic of Benin, Ketu region; Yoruba
Wood, metal nails, pigment; H. 41 in. (104.1 cm)
Gift of Roda and Gilbert Graham, 1992 (1992.225.1)

The masking tradition known as Gelede is believed to have originated among the Yoruba people of the Ketu region, in today's Republic of Benin, sometime in the late eighteenth century. Gelede honors the spiritual powers of elderly women who are referred to as *awon iya wa*, or "our mothers." Their powers are not limited to human fertility but extend to agricultural bounty, wealth, and human health, and are believed to be akin to those of the gods. In order to direct their potent energies positively, such elderly women must be appropriately honored.

Each year, at the beginning of a new agricultural cycle, Gelede performances are organized by the male and female titled elders of the Gelede society. While entertaining, and often ribald, the masquerades are a serious tribute to the contributions made by elderly women in order to maintain social order, preserve well-being, and reinforce cultural values. Numerous masquerades appear in sequence over a two-day period. The maskers, all male, wear sculpted wooden masks on top of their heads and, in some cases, carved wooden breasts and stomachs. The textiles used for their costumes are borrowed clothes of local women. The masked dancers perform in pairs, offering social and spiritual commentary through role recognition and satire. The elaborately choreographed dances are accompanied by an orchestra of drums and a chorus of male and female singers.

The imagery of the masks used in Gelede address a range of subjects relating to all aspects of Yoruba society. Usually, the base of a Gelede mask is a human face. The calm expression indicates patience and self-control, highly valued characteristics of female role models. The imagery above the face may depict animals, objects, or humans that refer to a particular individual or situation in the community, or it may illustrate a popular proverb or song. Such imagery often serves as a metaphor, designed to reinforce positive behavior within the community. In this example, one of an original pair, the face is flanked by long curving snakes that are devouring antelopes. Representations of animals consuming other animals are depicted frequently on Gelede masks. They are allusions to competing spiritual or social forces and encourage other, less destructive means to resolve conflict.

This mask reflects the creative collaboration of two generations of sculptors from the same workshop. The face was sculpted by Ketu master Fagbite Asamu, an artist who is remembered for his innovative Gelede creations which included movable attachments that could be manipulated by the performer. On this example, the hinged extensions in the form of snakes were carved by Fagbite's son, Falola Edun, who completed the work in 1971. The fluid forms of the serpents

are composed of interlocking segments of wood secured by nails. Because a premium is placed upon innovation in Gelede performances, new designs are continually introduced into the repertory of forms.

(Please see also two excerpts from the film *Efe/Gelede Ceremonies among the Western Yoruba*, which may be viewed on the Museum's website. One shows the sculptor Falola Edun completing work on the Gelede mask, while the other shows the mask being performed. [For complete information on these excerpts, see the Videography in the Selected Resources section.])

Discussion Questions

1. Unlike most African wood sculpture, this headdress was carved out of several pieces of wood. How many do you see?
2. The face was worn like a cap on the performer's head, with long curving extensions hanging down on each side. Can you see what these extensions represent? Discuss the meaning of the snake-eating-antelope imagery.
3. Why do Gelede masked performers celebrate elderly women?

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

20 Head of an Oba, ca. 1550
Nigeria, kingdom of Benin; Edo peoples
Brass; H. 9 1/4 in. (23.5 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.86)

Cast brass heads such as this one were commissioned by the kings of Benin to be placed on royal ancestral altars. The kingdom of Benin was a state founded around 1300 in the southern part of today's Nigeria. It flourished for over half a millennium led by a succession of dynastic leaders, known as Obas. The Oba, who was considered to be semi divine during his lifetime, was the political and spiritual leader of his people. He governed a complex network of lesser chiefs with varied political, administrative, and ritual duties. Upon ascending the throne, one of the Oba's first ritual duties was to establish an altar commemorating the life and achievements of the previous king, his father.

The heads cast in brass are idealized representations of the individual Obas. This head, which dates to the mid-sixteenth century, is among the earliest examples of the genre, as indicated by the thin casting and naturalistic style. Later examples are more stylized, heavier castings, as metal became more plentiful through trade with European merchants. Here, the face is softly modeled, with broad nose, generous lips, and fleshy cheeks. Iron inlays originally filled the pupils of the large eyes, to intensify the gaze; iron was associated with formidable strength. The Oba's crown, formed of diagonally woven strands of coral beads with long fringes, and his tiered coral necklace are rendered with exacting precision. The focus upon the head to represent the Oba is symbolically significant: in Benin culture, the head is believed to have a special role in directing an individual's success in life. Because the welfare of the entire kingdom is dependent on the king's guidance, his head was itself the focus of ritual attention.

Placed on the ancestral altar, the brass head not only commemorates a deceased Oba but offers an enduring reminder of his successful leadership throughout his reign. Such an altar was a point of contact with the spirit of the deceased king, should the Oba need support and advice from his ancestors. Palace ceremonies, in which the continuity of divine kingship was reinforced, took place—and continue to take place today—in front of these altars. Located in an open courtyard, royal ancestral altars are low, semicircular mud platforms. Hollow-cast brass heads, each supporting a carved ivory tusk (inserted into the large hole on top), would be placed on each altar along with other royal objects, including brass altar tableaus and figurative representations, carved wooden staffs, brass bells, and ceremonial swords. Brass and ivory, both valuable and durable materials, symbolized the Oba's power and wealth.

Historically, the Oba was the principal patron of the arts in Benin. The artists' guilds—which included blacksmiths, brass casters, sculptors in wood and ivory, bead workers and costume makers, and leather workers—worked

under his patronage. Most of the art created served to glorify the king, reinforce royal hierarchies, and enhance court life. Traditional art production under the patronage of the king came to an abrupt end in 1897, when British troops destroyed the capital city and looted the palace. Today the kingdom of Benin exists as a political subdivision within Nigeria. Many of its ritual, political, and artistic activities resumed in 1914, when the son of the king exiled in 1897 returned to Benin. Heirs to this tradition continue to represent their people as cultural leaders within the contemporary Nigerian state.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the function and meaning of this head. Why place images only of heads of the Obas on memorial altars?
2. How is the Oba's wealth and power symbolized in this head?
3. Why were elephants' tusks inserted into the hollow heads?
4. What do the iron eyeballs suggest about the Oba's character?
5. Notice the contrast between patterns and smooth surfaces. What material do the patterned areas represent?

21 Pendant Mask, 16th century
Nigeria, kingdom of Benin; Edo peoples
Ivory; H. 9 3/8 in. (23.8 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1972 (1978.412.323)

This pendant mask was created in the early sixteenth century for an Oba named Esigie, in honor of his mother Idia. The face has softly modeled, naturalistic features, with graceful curves that echo the oval shape of the head. Four carved scarification marks, a number associated with females, indicate her gender. Iron inlays for the pupils and rims of the eyes intensify the Queen Mother's authoritative gaze and suggest her inner strength. The two vertical depressions on her forehead were also inlaid with iron. She is depicted wearing a choker of coral beads and her hair is arranged in an elegant configuration that resembles a tiara. The intricately carved openwork designs are stylized mudfish alternating with the faces of Portuguese traders. Both motifs are associated with the Oba and his counterpart, the sea god Olokun. The mudfish is a creature that lives both on land and in water, and a symbol of the king's dual nature as both human and divine. Similarly, the Portuguese, as voyagers from across the sea, may have been seen as denizens of Olokun's realm. Like the sea god, they brought great wealth and power to the Oba.

In Benin culture, ivory holds both material and symbolic value. As a luxury good, ivory was Benin's principal commercial commodity and helped to attract Portuguese traders who, in turn, brought wealth to the kingdom in the form of copper and coral. In addition, ivory is white, a color that symbolizes ritual purity and is also associated with Olokun, who is considered to be a source of extraordinary wealth and fertility.

Queen Idia is honored as a powerful and politically astute woman who provided critical assistance to her son during the kingdom's battles to expand. Upon the successful conclusion of the war, Esigie paid tribute to Idia by bestowing upon her the title of Queen Mother, a custom that has continued with subsequent rulers until the present time. The title of Queen Mother, or I*yoba*, is given to the woman who bears the Oba's first son, the future ruler of the kingdom. Historically, the Queen Mother would have no other children and, instead, devote her life to raising her son. Oba Esigie is said to have worn the mask as a pectoral during rites commemorating his mother. The hollow back, holes around the perimeter, and stopper composed of several tendrils of hair at the summit suggest that the mask functioned as an amulet, filled with special and powerful materials that protected the wearer. Today, such pendants are worn at annual ceremonies of spiritual renewal and purification.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the expression on her face suggest? What suggests that this is the face of a ruler?
2. What do the iron inlays in the eyes signify? What shows that this is a queen, not an Oba?
3. Discuss the function and meaning of this object.
4. What do the depictions of Portuguese merchants and mudfish on her crown symbolize? Discuss the unusual abilities of the mudfish. How do they relate to the Oba?

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

22 Plaque: Oba on Horseback, ca. 1550–1680
Nigeria, kingdom of Benin; Edo peoples
Brass; H. 19 1/2 in. (49.5 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1965 (1978.412.309)

Around 1600, a Dutch visitor to the court of Benin described the magnificent palace complex, with its high-turreted buildings, as one of immense size and striking beauty. In the long, square galleries, wooden pillars were covered from top to bottom with brass plaques. Cast in relief from a wax model, the plaques were mounted on the palace pillars by nails punched through the corners. The plaques depicted the Oba and various members of his retinue, including warrior chiefs, titleholders, priests, court officials, attendants, and foreign merchants. Shown singly or in small groups, the figures are portrayed in meticulous detail, their role and status indicated by costume, ornament, and hairstyle. On plaques with multiple figures, the scale of the figures denotes their position within Benin court hierarchy. The largest one is most important, with others decreasing in size according to their relative significance.

On this plaque, a regally dressed Oba seated sidesaddle on a horse is accompanied by prominent officials and other attendants. To emphasize his power and authority, the Oba is positioned in the center, is the largest figure, and wears his full coral bead regalia, including a high collar of stacked necklaces and crown of beads. All coral was owned by the Oba and, because it comes from the sea, is associated with Olokun, god of the sea. The Oba is attended by two smaller figures holding protective shields. These titled administrative officials were responsible for palace provisions and for supplying ceremonial sacrifices. Swordbearers of lesser rank, indicated by their smaller size, support the king's outstretched arms. Smaller still, and therefore of least importance, are the two miniature figures who hover in the corners above the Oba and the one who supports his feet. The background is ornamented by **quatrefoil** motifs representing river leaves, an allusion to Olokun and the prosperity brought across the seas through trade with the Portuguese.

In African art, the materials are often as meaningful as the forms the artist gives them. Because brass, an alloy of copper and zinc, was scarce and costly, its use was dictated exclusively by the Oba, whose possession and control of brass connoted his power, wealth, and authority. The durability of the metal was fitting for objects intended to be lasting tributes to the greatness of Benin kings. The shiny, reddish gold surface of polished brass was considered beautiful yet intimidating, an appropriate symbol for royal power.

Although it is not known how the brass plaques were originally arranged on the pillars, scholars generally agree that they were conceived in groups. By the end of the seventeenth century, the plaques were no longer used as decoration but were stored in the palace and consulted on matters of court etiquette, costume, and ceremony. Almost 900 of these plaques survive today, providing a detailed visual record of court life.

Discussion Questions

1. How has the artist made the Oba stand out in this scene?
2. What details communicate the Oba's power?
3. How is scale used to indicate the relative importance of each figure in this scene? How do these shifts in scale reflect court hierarchies?
4. Why are the heads of the Oba and the court officials large compared to the rest of their anatomies?
5. Discuss the function of plaques such as this and the identity of each of the figures depicted here.

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

23 Shrine (I*firi*), 19th–20th century
Nigeria, Niger Delta region; Western Ijo
Wood, paint; H. 25 7/16 in. (64.8 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Matthew T. Mellon Foundation, 1960 (1978.412.404)

Sculptural shrines, called *ifiri* by the Western Ijo, are found among the diverse communities of peoples living in the Niger Delta region of coastal Nigeria. The creation and use of *ifiri* are informed by the warrior ethos of the Ijo, who proudly regard themselves as warlike people. The form of *ifiri* is notable for its raw ferocity, conveyed visually through a combination of imagery that evokes both human and animal elements. Owned by an individual, clan, or family, an *ifiri* embodies notions of aggression and personal achievement. It offers protection against violence, while serving as a menacing reminder of the owner's accomplishments and destructive potential.

This shrine takes the form of a human being seated on a stool on top of a snarling, four-legged animal. The animal's massive rectangular head with two large horns, gaping mouth framed by fangs, and bared teeth convey a threatening demeanor. There is no consensus on the source of the animal imagery, which may incorporate the features of leopards, hippos, and/or elephants. On its legs are human heads or skulls with similarly prominent teeth. The figure above represents a warrior, perhaps the owner of the shrine. He wears a headdress with four inverted horns and bares his teeth. The sharp pointed shapes of the horns and fangs add to the sense of aggression. In his right hand, he grasps a cup with which he will pour libations to the shrine. In his left, he displays a small fan that, along with his seated position and scarification marks, symbolize status and wealth.

While the exact meaning of such imagery may be unclear, the function of the work is unambiguous. Offerings to these shrines were believed to contribute to the success of such male occupations as hunting, trade, and war by enhancing strength and ferocity. Additionally, libations were made to express gratitude for past successes and protection. Such shrines continue to be employed as a deterrent against urban violence.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your reaction to this image? What are its threatening features?
2. Notice the variety of geometric forms. What shapes are repeated?
3. How would you describe the animal on which this man sits?
4. Discuss the function of this object. What does this shrine tell us about its owner? What were his ambitions?

24 Janus-Faced Headdress, 19th–20th century
Nigeria, Cross River region; Ejagham, Akparabong clan
Wood, leather, paint, cane, horn, nails; H. 21 in. (53.3 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.299)

Skin-covered headdresses are owned by associations whose membership is defined by age, sex, vocation, or skill. These associations include hunter and warrior societies, age-level groups, and societies of wealthy men and women. The headdresses are worn during funerals and initiations of association members and sometimes used for ceremonies related to agricultural concerns.

The technique of covering carved wood headdresses with leather is unique to the area along the Cross River, which straddles the border between the present-day nations of Nigeria and Cameroon. Artists use antelope skin softened by a lengthy soaking in water. The skin is then stretched over the carved wooden form and bound and pegged in place, where it eventually dries and stiffens. A glossy surface is achieved by rubbing the headdress with palm oil prior to its performance. The performer, who wears a long gown of string netting or cotton cloth, attaches the basketry cap of the headdress to the top of his head with a chinstrap. His face is covered with semitransparent cloth. Between performances, the headdress is wrapped and stored with great care.

This exceptional example has a solid wooden core carved with two similar faces in opposing directions, often referred to as a Janus face. The strikingly lifelike faces, covered with leather, have eyes made of separate pieces of leather pegged into the finished piece. Four curved and ribbed antelope horns, accented with blue pigment, are set into holes on the top of the head. Painted designs on the forehead and cheeks of the faces represent *nsibidi*, an indigenous writing system whose symbols were sometimes tattooed on the human body. Multiple levels of meaning are attached to such symbols, knowledge of which is often restricted to association members of the highest status and rank. Likewise, the Janus face has several levels of meaning. It conveys the ability to simultaneously see what is in front and behind, to discern connections between past and future events, and to observe both the human and spiritual worlds.

Discussion Questions

1. The term "Janus-faced" comes from the Roman god Janus, who was the patron of beginnings and endings. What advantages would you have if you could see both in front of and behind you?
2. What do the expressions on the two faces suggest?
3. What materials were added to the wood base of this headdress?
4. The markings are symbols whose meaning would have been known only by high-ranking members of an association. Why would the artist include such markings?
5. What shapes and outlines are repeated here? Which details contrast with the overall roundness?

25 Figure of a Chief (L*efem*), 19th–20th century
Cameroon; Bangwa
Wood; H. 40 1/4 in. (102.2 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Purchase, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, 1968 (1978.412.576)

In the various Bangwa **chiefdom**s of western Cameroon, figurative sculptures, known as *lefem*, are created to commemorate royal ancestors. These monumental portraits depict the chief, or Fon, as well as other members of the royal family. Commissioned during the lifetime of the chief, the sculptures would be presented publicly after his death, during funeral ceremonies honoring the Fon and marking the installation of his successor. They were displayed in the palace courtyard along with other commemorative portraits of rulers from previous generations. Viewed together, these sculptures document dynastic lines of leadership and serve as visual reminders of the Fon's legacy.

This dynamic figure of a Bangwa Fon emphasizes the power, wealth, and privilege of his position. The cap he wears represents a type of prestige hat that is woven and decorated with knotted tufts of yarn. Around his neck is an elaborate collar of leopard's claws, a symbol of the ruler's strength. The Fon is depicted holding other official insignia of ritual importance. In his right hand is a beaded calabash, a container for palm wine; in his left is a long-stemmed pipe for smoking tobacco. Palm wine and tobacco were believed to have life-giving properties whose consumption reinforced the Fon's power. The figure's dynamic stance, with his head turning one way and the lower body another, is unusual in African sculpture. His bent legs, flexed arms, large bulging eyes, and open mouth further suggest that the potent energy of the Fon remains even after his death.

Discussion Questions

1. How is the power of this chief expressed visually? What features has the sculptor exaggerated? Why?
2. Discuss the function of sculpture like this.
3. The king holds two objects that, it was believed, would fuel his life force. Can you identify them? (See also image 26.)
4. Compare this figure with other standing figures in this publication. What is different about the pose?

26 Palm-Wine Container, 19th–20th century
Cameroon; Grassfields
Gourd, glass beads, cloth, cane; H. 30 in. (76.2 cm)
Purchase, Gifts in memory of Bryce Holcombe, 1986 (1986.336a,b)

Of the many ritual items in a Grassfields kingdom's royal treasury, bead-embroidered calabashes are among the most important. These containers were used exclusively by the Fon (chief) to store palm wine served on ceremonial occasions (fig. 4). The ritual consumption of palm wine was considered a sacred activity and reinforced the Fon's spiritual and political power. Palm wine was also an essential component of sacrificial libations to the ancestors.

This example features a long-necked calabash attached to a tall cylindrical basketry base. The carved wood stopper has two horned animal heads facing opposing directions and a third animal head pointing upward, symbols of all-seeing powers. The entire assemblage is covered with cloth embroidered with strands of translucent and opaque glass beads that form intricate and colorful circular, diamond-shaped, and zigzag patterns.

These abstract geometric motifs symbolize attributes of royal power. The circular medallions surrounding the spherical body refer to the earth spider, a symbol of supernatural wisdom and communication. Because this type of spider burrows in the earth, it is believed to have the ability to unite humans, who live above the ground, with the ancestors who are buried below. Diamond-shaped motifs on the stopper and on the sides and bottom rim of the stand represent the frog, a symbol of fertility and increase. Their presence on the container conveys the idea that, with the support of many people, a peaceful and prosperous kingdom is possible.

Rulers throughout the many kingdoms in the Grassfields region of western Cameroon employed a range of art objects to assert their political, economic, and religious power. Presented publicly in lavish displays of wealth and power, many court objects were distinguished by their elaborate bead embroidery. Imported from Europe, beads were considered a luxury material whose use and distribution were controlled by the Fon. The decoration of wooden sculpture with vast quantities of brilliantly colored beads transformed utilitarian objects, such as stools, vessels, and pipes, into symbols of royal status and prestige.

Fig. 4. Chief of Babungo with attendants, one holding a palm-wine container, Cameroon. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, 1938.

Discussion Questions

1. With what is the surface of this container covered?
2. How does the decoration of this, and other objects in the royal treasury, reflect the wealth and status of the ruler?
3. How many patterns can you identify? In what ways do these patterns reinforce the three-dimensional form of the container? What forms decorate the stopper?
4. Discuss the symbolic significance of the abstract animal forms.

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

27 Reliquary Figure (N*lo* B*yeri*), 19th–20th century
Gabon; Fang
Wood, metal, oil; H. 25 1/4 in. (64.1 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1965 (1978.412.441)

Fig. 5. Figures sitting atop reliquary containers, southern Cameroon. Photograph by Hans Gehne, ca. 1913.

The Fang peoples of Gabon believed that ancestral relics held great spiritual power. Byeri was a Fang association devoted to the **veneration** of lineage ancestors and founders, leaders, and fertile women who made significant contributions to society during their lifetime. After death, their relics, particularly the skull, were conserved in cylindrical bark containers and guarded by carved wooden heads or figures mounted atop the receptacles (fig. 5).

The lustrous black surface of this carved female figure still glistens from repeated applications of palm oil used for ritual purification. The sculptor shaped this figure to illustrate the ability to hold opposites in balance, a quality admired by the Fang. He juxtaposed the large head of an infant with the developed body of an adult. The static pose and expressionless face contrast with the palpable tension of the bulging muscles and the projecting forms of the arms, legs, and breasts.

These reliquary sculptures may be male or female and are not considered portraits of the deceased. They were often decorated with gifts of jewelry or feathers and received ritual offerings of libations, such as palm oil. On the occasion of initiation into Byeri, the figures were removed from their containers and manipulated like puppets in performances that dramatized the raising of the dead for didactic purposes.

During the early twentieth century, Fang reliquary sculpture began to be acquired by Western collectors, who admired the inspired interpretation of the human form. This particular work was formerly in the collections of two well-known modernist artists, the painter André Derain and the sculptor Jacob Epstein.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the shapes of the figure's body. Which ones are exaggerated? What does the pose of the legs and arms suggest?
2. The idea of opposites in balance exemplifies Fang social ideals. How does this sculpture give visual form to the idea of opposites in balance? (Notice the contrast between the face and body, and between balanced pose and bulging muscles.) Make a list of opposites you can identify.
3. Discuss the function of this object as well as its surface sheen.

28 Crucifix, 16th–early 17th century
Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola; Kongo
Brass; H. 10 3/4 in. (27.3 cm)
Gift of Ernst Anspach, 1999 (1999.295.7)

When Portuguese explorers first arrived at the mouth of the Zaire River in 1483, the Kongo kingdom was thriving and prosperous, with extensive commercial networks between the coast, interior, and equatorial forests to the north. Portugal and Kongo soon established a strong trading partnership. In addition to material goods, the Portuguese also brought Christianity, which was rapidly adopted by Kongo rulers and established as the state religion in the early sixteenth century by King Afonso Mvemba a Nzinga. The adoption of Christianity allowed Kongo kings to foster international alliances not only with Portuguese leaders but also with the Vatican. In response to their new faith, Kongo craftsmen began to introduce Christian iconography into their artistic repertoire.

This crucifix demonstrates how Kongo artists adapted and transformed Western Christian prototypes. Although the general depiction of the central Christ figure with arms extended follows Western conventions, the features of the face are African. The presence of four smaller figures with clasped hands—two seated on the top edges of the cross, one at the apex, and one at the base—is a departure from standard iconography. These figures are more abstract and remote, in contrast to the expressionistic treatment of Christ.

Western forms like the crucifix resonated profoundly with preexisting Kongo religious practices. In Kongo belief, the cross was already regarded as a powerful emblem of spirituality and a metaphor for the cosmos. An icon of a cross within a circle, referred to as the Four Moments of the Sun, represents the four parts of the day (dawn, noon, dusk, and night) that symbolize more broadly the cyclical journey of life. Kongo kings, having adopted Christianity as the state religion, commissioned locally made crucifixes for use as emblems of leadership and power. These crucifixes were cast with copper alloys. The use of copper, a valued import from Europe, reinforced the association with wealth and power. Although Christianity was eventually rejected by the Kongo in the seventeenth century, such works continued to be made as symbols of indigenous cosmological concepts.

Discussion Questions

1. Which figure in the composition is most important? Explain. How do the four smaller figures relate to the larger central figure?
2. Besides being a Christian symbol, what other symbolic meanings might a cross have?
3. Why would copper alloy crucifixes continue to be valued by Kongo leaders after the rejection of Christianity?

29 Seated Figure (*Tumba*), 19th–20th century
Democratic Republic of Congo; Kongo, Bambona
Steatite; H. 16 1/4 in. (41.3 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Purchase, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, 1968 (1978.412.573)

In the Boma region of Democratic Republic of Congo, Kongo peoples placed carved stone figures representing important individuals on their graves to remember their deeds in life. These figures are characterized by their wide range of gestures and postures. They are also distinguished by their use of stone, unusual in sub-Saharan Africa, where most carving traditions are based on wood. The association of stone with the concept of permanence makes it appropriate for use in commemorative funerary statuary.

The person commemorated in this example, made of **steatite**, was probably a ruler or noble. He wears a royal cap and a necklace, which symbolize rank and leadership. He sits cross-legged, left hand at his waist and right supporting his large, slightly tilted head. Downcast eyes imply deep thought, while his faint smile suggests serenity and calm. The figure appears closed in on the right side by its large arm. In contrast, the angular pose of the shorter left arm opens up the figure's form. Kongo commentators describe this cross-legged seated posture as *funda nkata*, a position that emphasizes balance, composure, and reflection. On a symbolic level, the circular shape formed by the crossed legs refers to the unfolding cycle of an individual's life. Embodying responsible and wise leadership, the sculpture presents an ideal image of the deceased that illustrates the Kongo dictum: "I seat myself nobly, upon the circle of my life, weighing what is going on."

Discussion Questions

1. What does the expression on the face suggest? And the pose?
2. Discuss the function of stone sculpture like this. Why would the artist use stone? What mood do the downcast eyes evoke? And the faint smile?
3. Consider the Kongo dictum "I seat myself nobly, upon the circle of life, weighing what is going on." How does this figure give visual form to this saying?
4. What details suggest this figure was a leader? Why is the size of the head exaggerated?

30 Power Figure (N*kisi nkondi*), 19th century
Democratic Republic of Congo; Kongo
Wood, iron, glass, terracotta, shells, cloth, fiber, paint, seeds, beads; H. 28 1/2 in. (72.4 cm)
The Muriel Kallis Steinberg Newman Collection, Gift of Muriel Kallis Newman, in honor of Douglas Newton, 1990 (1990.334)

Fig. 6. Postcard of a Vili diviner (*nganga*), a ritual practitioner in Loango, French Congo. Photograph by P. A., ca. 1900.

This large figure was carved by a Kongo sculptor for a ritual practitioner, who transformed the object into a vehicle of spiritual communication. Its pose—feet planted firmly, hands on hips, and head tilted upward—suggests heightened awareness and readiness. However, the figure could not fulfill its function until the ritual practitioner activated it with spiritually charged ingredients (fig. 6). These included certain earths associated with the ancestors and their supernatural abilities as well as other organic materials, the names of which reference attributes that can heighten the figure's effectiveness. The ritual practitioner packed these sacred substances into the rectangular box inserted into the figure's abdomen, a bodily site that the Kongo consider the source of life and personal achievement. He inserted other empowering ingredients, such as dog's and leopard's teeth, into the figure's clay hat. Pieces of glass mirror, over the rectangular box and inlaid in the eyes, serve to deflect malevolent forces, while the white clay covering the face refers to the realm of the ancestral spirits from which the figure derives its powers. The figure's protruding tongue refers to the Kongo word *venda*, meaning "to lick in order to activate medicines," implying that the figure is continually activated.

The Kongo refer to such power objects as *nkisi*. They are used by ritual practitioners to solve the problems of the community. This example is an especially powerful type of *nkisi* that is associated with moral judgment. Known as *nkisi nkondi*, its purpose was to identify and hunt down wrongdoers, such as witches, thieves, and adulterers (*nkondi* means "hunter"). Each time the figure's powers were called upon, a ritual expert would insert an iron blade, spike, or nail.

The variously shaped bits of metal covering the body provide a visual history of its use, its surface continually added to with each invocation. Many of the blades are identified as *baaku*, a type of knife used in palm wine extraction. The similarity of this word to *baaka*, meaning "to demolish or destroy," is a deliberate visual pun that relates to the figure's function of destroying evil within the community.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your reaction to this figure? Note the pose and expression. What words would you use to describe the figure's attitude?
2. How many materials have been added to the basic wood form? What ideas do they symbolize?
3. Discuss the function of power figures.

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

31 Chair (N*gumdja*), 19th–20th century
Angola; Chokwe
Wood, brass tacks, leather; H. 39 in. (99.1 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Purchase, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, 1970 (1978.412.619)

This chair or throne was one of the principal symbols of the authority of a Chokwe chief. The Chokwe state was founded in the sixteenth century, when nobles from the neighboring Lunda empire migrated to northern Angola and asserted their rule over local peoples. As the state grew in wealth and power, so too did the Chokwe chiefs, who emphasized the divine nature of their ancestry. The political and religious importance of the chiefs was underscored through the creation of lavishly carved utilitarian objects, including staffs, tobacco mortars, combs, and chairs, that served as insignia of rank and prestige.

This chair was modeled on a type of European chair that was imported into the area by Portuguese officials beginning in the seventeenth century. Having previously used **caryatid** stools as seats of office, Chokwe chiefs adopted the chair as a symbol of their authority because the form was associated with powerful foreigners. Like its European prototype, the Chokwe chair was made from several pieces of wood joined together, rather than a single block of wood typical of African carving traditions.

Aspects of the chair are European in derivation, such as the leather-covered seat and decorative brass tacks, an imported luxury. However, Chokwe artisans incorporated the style and iconography of their established sculptural traditions. On this example, the backrest is topped on either side by a carved head wearing a chief's headdress, while in the center, two birds drink from a shared vessel. Rows of figures along the rungs and back splats depict characters and scenes from both everyday and ceremonial life. Here, images of hunting, trade, and domestic activities are juxtaposed with representations of ritual events, such as initiation and masquerades. Together, the scenes describe an ordered and harmonious society over which the chief presides.

Discussion Questions

1. What kind of person would have sat in this chair?
2. Why would a ruler want so many kinds of people represented on his chair?
3. How did the carver arrange the small figures? What forms are repeated? How would you describe the overall design?
4. Discuss the European origin of this kind of seating.

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

32 Mask, 19th–20th century
Democratic Republic of Congo; Yaka
Wood, cane, raffia, pigment, cloth; H. 17 3/4 in. (45.1 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.235)

This mask was created to be worn during the initiation ceremonies of Yaka boys (fig. 7). It is composed of a carved wooden face with raffia collar attached to a basketry framework covered with fiber cloth. A four-legged beast crouches at the summit. Its outstretched fiber arms with carved wooden hands extend toward the face, which has exaggerated features. Enormous protruding circular eyes, a long nose, fangs, and cocked ears convey a sense of extraordinary curiosity and energy.

Among the Yaka, the institution responsible for initiation of boys into manhood is called *nkhanda*. In the past, boys resided within an initiation camp, located outside the village, for a training period of one to three years. Today, these initiations last approximately a week and provide historical, social, and religious instruction. The boys also undergo a number of physical ordeals, including circumcision, culminating in their symbolic death as children and rebirth as men.

Fig. 7. Masked performance as part of a Yaka *nkhanda* initiation ceremony. Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, 1951.

Throughout their seclusion and upon conclusion of their training, members of *nkhanda* present a variety of masked performances. The masks are believed to offer protection to the boys during the period of physical and spiritual vulnerability. They also serve to introduce important Yaka moral and social precepts as well as to entertain. Historically, these masks were destroyed at the end of the initiation period.

Although the specific meaning of the imagery is unclear, Yaka masks generally illustrate ideas about gender differences, translating song lyrics that focus on male and female social responsibilities into visual form. On this mask, for example, the bulging eyes are round like the moon, relating to lunar cycles and, indirectly, alluding to the role of women.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the creature on top of this mask?
2. Besides educating boys, why might this mask also have been worn to entertain?
3. What materials have been added to the wooden shape?
4. Discuss traditional initiations and the functions of masks like this one.

33 Prestige Panel, 19th–20th century
Democratic Republic of Congo; Kuba
Raffia; 20 1/4 x 45 3/4 in. (51.4 x 116.2 cm)
Gift of William B. Goldstein M.D., 1999 (1999.522.15)

This double panel of raffia cloth with cut-pile embroidery was created to serve as a prestige item in Kuba society. The Kuba kingdom has a complex political structure composed of independent chiefdoms under the central authority of a king. It was founded in the early seventeenth century by Shyaam a-Mbul a Ngoong, a ruler who brought together some seventeen different ethnic groups into a unified polity. Shyaam is recalled as a dynamic and innovative leader who introduced a number of important Kuba artistic traditions, including lavish woven and embroidered textiles made of raffia. In fact, the Kuba founding ruler is said to have identified so closely with the patronage of these textiles that he adopted the term for raffia palm, *shyaam*, as his name.

In this complex composition, each panel features a large central interlacing motif against a diamond-patterned background. The dense patterns have been embroidered with strands of dyed raffia fiber that are cut close to the surface, creating a soft, velvety texture. Varying in both tone and texture, the patterns project dramatically from the gold field.

Fig. 8. A Northern Kete man cutting a completed unit of raffia cloth (*mbala*) off a loom. Photograph by Patricia Darish, 1981.

The preparation, production, and design of Kuba raffia textiles require the collaborative efforts of both men and women. Men are responsible for cultivating raffia palm trees and collecting the outer layers of the fronds, which yield fiber strands. They weave these strands on a vertical heddle loom into panels of cloth (fig. 8). Individual woven units, known as *mbala*, are softened and refined to a linenlike texture by pounding. These flat-woven panels may then be decorated and stitched together to form garments. Women assemble and decorate their own skirts, which can be up to nine yards in length. Men fashion their skirts, which can be of greater length and have a border of raffia tufts. Both genders employ a range of decorative processes, including dying, appliqué, embroidery, and patchwork, although some distinctive techniques, such as openwork and cut-pile, are practiced only by women. The completed garments are worn differently: women wrap the skirt around their bodies, while men gather the cloth around their hips, secured by a belt with the top folded over.

Some raffia cloth, like this panel, was not fashioned into garments, but was displayed instead as prestige items. In the past, individual panels of raffia textiles were used as objects of exchange in financial, legal, and even marital transactions. They were also displayed and offered as memorial gifts during funerals, as an indication of the deceased's importance as well as the generosity of the surviving family members. Today, despite the availability of machine-made cotton cloth, raffia textiles are still regarded as the only kind of garment appropriate to adorn the body of the deceased. An important individual may be buried dressed in multiple layers of raffia skirts, often family treasures passed down through generations.

Discussion Questions

1. What patterns are repeated in the design? How did the textile designer achieve variation within each pattern?
2. Why would a textile panel like this one be highly valued?
3. Discuss the technique of creating these raffia textiles and how it involved the collaboration of both men and women.

34 Stool, late 19th century
Attributed to the Buli Master, possibly known as Ngongo ya Chintu
Democratic Republic of Congo; Luba
Wood, metal studs; H. 24 in. (61 cm)
Purchase, Buckeye Trust and Charles B. Benenson Gifts, Rogers Fund and funds from various donors, 1979 (1979.290)

Sculpted seats are among the most important insignia of office used exclusively by Luba rulers, including kings, chiefs, and the heads of clans or lineages. A royal stool is believed to serve as a receptacle for a ruler's spirit. It therefore holds great symbolic value as the repository and wellspring of sacred kingship. Such seats, part of the ensemble of regalia that constitutes a Luba treasury, are an integral part of the investiture ceremony establishing a ruler's political authority. Except for these rare ceremonial occasions, the royal stool was wrapped in cloth and safeguarded by a specially designated official.

This figurative example is supported by a standing female figure whose high status is indicated by her elaborate four-lobed coiffure and intricate raised scarification patterns on her torso, both front and back. The depiction of women on royal stools acknowledges their important political and symbolic roles in Luba society. Historically, female royals were often married to chiefs in outlying areas, helping to expand and unify the kingdom. Because the Luba trace succession and inheritance through the female line, such marriages established important bonds of kinship and allegiance. The imagery of the female supporting the stool symbolizes the fact that the chief or king inherits the right to rule through his female ancestors. Luba leaders owned a series of items of regalia depicting female figures which referred to the female body as a receptacle for the spiritual power of divine kingships.

This royal ceremonial stool was created by an artist known as the Buli Master, celebrated for the distinctive formal structure and emotional appeal of his sculptures. His extraordinary artistic legacy is a corpus of about twenty stylistically related works, all demonstrating a unique expressionism. Lacking the youthful idealism more commonly seen in African sculpture, this figure has an elongated face with prominent cheekbones, arching brows, half-closed eyes set in sunken sockets, a high rounded forehead, and pursed lips. Her body is small and stooped, suggesting that the seat weighs heavily upon her. These features create a sense of sadness or suffering not typically seen in African sculpture, which tends to be fairly emotionless. The Buli Master, named after a village in the eastern part of Democratic Republic of Congo where some of his works were acquired, is believed to have been active in the mid- to late nineteenth century.

The sculptor has created a dynamic formal composition, building in volume and complexity from the base to the top. Her large feet, barely raised from the base of the stool, provide the foundation for the stool's vertical support formed by her short sturdy legs, torso, and large oval head. The seat rests upon her coiffure and the tips of her fingers. The sense that she bears a heavy burden is reinforced by exaggerated flattened hands.

All royal stools are conceived of as replicas of an original seat of office given to the Luba king Kalala Ilunga. The Luba kingdom was said to have been founded by Kalala Ilunga, a heroic prince who overthrew his despotic uncle to establish a new dynasty of divine rulers. Leaders of the various Luba chiefdoms in the area have historically traced their descent from this founding ruler. Their exalted position within this sacred line of succession is expressed materially by the possession of royal insignia designed to bolster chiefly authority.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did the artist exaggerate the size of the woman's head and hands? Does the head communicate something about the woman's character? How do the hands function in the design of the stool?
2. How would you describe the woman's expression and her posture? Is she old or young? Discuss the distinctive style of the Buli Master.
3. What details indicate that this is a woman of high status? Why is an elite female depicted as supporting a male ruler? Discuss the symbolism of rulers' stools in a matrilineal society.

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

35 **Harp**, 19th–20th century
Democratic Republic of Congo; Mangbetu
Wood, hide, twine, brass ring; H. 26 1/2 in. (67.3 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Purchase, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, 1960 (1978.412.412)

In northern Democratic Republic of Congo, the Mangbetu peoples established an influential centralized kingdom that reached its apex of power during the second half of the nineteenth century. Mangbetu aristocrats surrounded themselves with a variety of finely crafted utilitarian objects, including boxes, stools, weapons, and musical instruments. The opulence of the kingdom captured the attention of European visitors to the region, who described Mangbetu court life and its artistic traditions in glowing terms.

This musical instrument, with freestanding strings that rise in a horizontal plane from its belly to neck, is a harp. The curved neck ends in a finely carved head with partially open mouth, as if in song. The wooden sound box is covered with carefully stitched animal hide. When playing the harp, a musician sat with the sound box on his lap and the neck pointing away from him. He held the neck with his left hand and plucked the strings with both. The harp player adjusted the tone of each string by turning the tuning pegs set in the harp's neck. Harp players performed for the entertainment of community groups and, as they played, sang about events in their travels and heroic deeds of the past.

The presence of a carved head on this harp may reflect an African response to Western aesthetic taste and patronage. In the colonial period, Europeans began to commission sculpture from local Mangbetu artists, expanding the demand for such works. Fascinated by the bound and elongated heads once common among the Mangbetu (fig. 9), European patrons encouraged artists to include human forms on objects that were previously nonfigurative. Although popular as gifts to visiting foreign dignitaries, these figurative objects were rarely commissioned for local use and their production eventually ceased.

Fig. 9. Mangbetu woman, ca. 1926. Photograph by Casimir d'Ostoja Zagourski.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the form of the harp echo the forms of the human body?
2. What does the expression on the face suggest? What does it tell us about Mangbetu ideals of beauty? Discuss the elite style of head deformation and extraordinary coiffure.
3. Discuss the influence of European taste in the design of this musical instrument.

36 Apron (I*jogolo*), 19th–20th century
South Africa; Ndebele
Leather, beads, thread; H. 29 3/4 in. (75.6 cm)
Gift of J. Camp, 1980 (1980.328)

This five-paneled garment is known as an *ijogolo*, a bridal apron worn by Ndebele women. Upon marriage, the groom's family traditionally gave the bride a plain leather or canvas apron with five flaps. The newly married Ndebele woman embroidered that apron, creating bold geometric designs with imported glass beads. She would wear this apron on important ceremonial occasions to signify her married status (fig. 10). The multiple panels, referred to as "calves," symbolize the future children the woman will bear.

Fig. 10. A married Ndebele woman wearing a beaded bridal apron. Photograph by John B. Kramer, 1971

Throughout southern Africa, peoples wear beaded garments that comment upon their stage in life and convey aspects of their individual identity. Different types of beaded artifacts may communicate social and marital status, number of children, and a person's home region or ethnicity.

Although the historical origins of southern African beadwork are uncertain, it is known that glass beads from Europe were available in the area as early as the sixteenth century through trade with the Portuguese. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the region became the world's largest consumer of glass beads. Dating beaded works is difficult, although the color and size of the beads, the patterns and motifs, and the material used can all provide some indication of age. Older works typically have leather backings and use mostly small, white beads with minimal color designs, as in this example.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the function of aprons in Ndebele societies.
2. What does the fancy beadwork tell us about the young woman who created it?
3. What patterns and color contrasts did she repeat?
4. Why would such aprons be worn only on ceremonial occasions? What would a Ndebele woman want to communicate to other people in her community when she wore this apron?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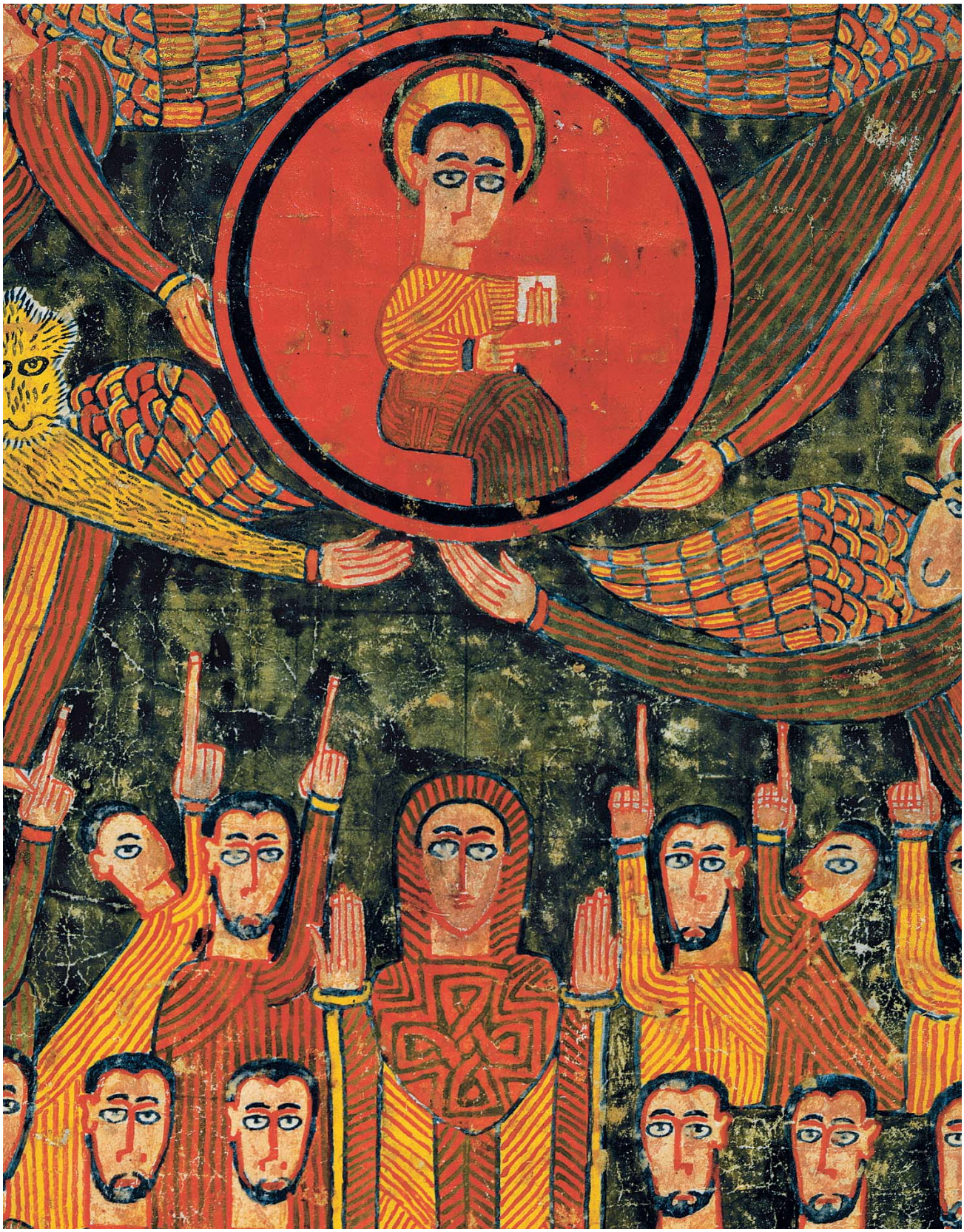
37 Page from an Illuminated Gospel ("The Ascension"), early 15th century
Ethiopia, Lake Tana region
Wood, vellum, pigment; H. 16 1/2 in. (41.9 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1998 (1998.66)

This full-page illumination is one of twenty-four from a manuscript of the Gospel that reflects Ethiopia's longstanding Christian heritage. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was established in the fourth century by King Ezana (r. 320–350). He adopted Christianity as the official state religion of Aksum, a kingdom located in the highlands of present-day Ethiopia. As the Christian state expanded over the centuries, monasteries were founded throughout the region. These became important centers of learning and artistic production, as well as influential outposts of state power.

The manuscript was created at a monastic center near Lake Tana in the early fifteenth century. It is composed of 178 leaves of vellum bound between acacia wood covers. The illuminations depict scenes from the life of Christ and portraits of the Evangelists. This text and its pictorial format are based upon manuscripts produced by the Coptic Church. Here, however, these prototypes are transformed into local forms of expression. For example, the imagery is two-dimensional and linear, which is characteristic of Ethiopian painting. Additionally, the text is inscribed not in its original Greek, but in Ge'ez, the ancient liturgical language of Ethiopia. Ge'ez is one of the world's oldest writing systems and is the foundation of today's Amharic, Ethiopia's national language.

In this depiction of the Ascension of Christ into heaven, he appears framed in a red circle at the summit, surrounded by the four beasts of the Evangelists. Below, Mary and the Apostles gesture upward. The stylistic conventions seen here, such as the abbreviated definition of facial features and boldly articulated figures, are consistent throughout the manuscript, suggesting the hand of a single artist. The artist depicts the figures' heads frontally and their bodies frequently in profile. The use of red, yellow, green, and blue as the predominant color scheme is typical of Ethiopian manuscripts from this period. The images were intended to be viewed during liturgical processions.

The Gospels were considered among the most holy of Christian texts by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Such manuscripts were often commissioned by wealthy patrons for presentation as gifts to churches. While the text demonstrated the erudition of its monastic creator, the elaborate ornamentation reflected the prestige of the benefactors. Many works of Ethiopian art were destroyed by Islamic incursions during the sixteenth century, making this manuscript a rare survivor.



Discussion Questions

1. How does the artist communicate which of the figures are most important?
2. What kind of composition is this? How are the figures arranged?
3. How is a feeling of vertical motion created? Who is the figure depicted in the circle above?
4. Do the figures seem to be standing in a real setting or out of time and place? Explain. Why is this appropriate to the subject?

For further discussion exercises, please see Comparisons for Classroom Discussion in the Classroom Applications section.

38 Textile Mantle (*Lamba Mpanjaka*), 1998
Martin Rakotoarimanana (b. 1963)
Madagascar; Malagasy (Merina)
Silk; H. 108 in. (274.3 cm)
Purchase, Rogers Fund and William B. Goldstein Gift, 1999 (1999.102)

Situated in the Indian Ocean just off the east coast of Africa, the unique island cultures of the Malagasy peoples emerged from a confluence of African, Asian, and Arab origins. While sharing a common heritage, their diversity finds expression in the variety of hand-woven textiles that have long been produced on the island. Among the most celebrated of Malagasy textile traditions is silk cloth produced by Merina weavers in the central highlands since precolonial times.

Historically, such brilliantly colored and intricately patterned textiles were made by female weavers from dyed silk thread purchased from Arab and Indian traders. Beginning in the nineteenth century, the silk was locally grown. Weavers create the textile on a horizontal, fixed heddle loom with a continuous **weft** and **warp** using a technique called *akotofahana*. Geometric designs were created by adding supplementary weft threads that "float" over the woven ground. These motifs, which may derive from plant and animal imagery, use color and pattern combinations to dazzling effect.

Merina silk textiles were highly regarded for their durability, sheen, and warmth. Privileged classes of Merina society wore the cloth as *lamba*, a type of mantle that is draped around the shoulders or over the body. In death, the cloths served as funerary shrouds for these nobles. The value and prestige associated with *akotofahana* textiles was such that they were also given as gifts to foreign dignitaries.

The tradition of weaving elaborately patterned silk textiles was abandoned by the late nineteenth century, with the increasing importation of less costly European textiles. A century later, however, finely worked *akotofahana* is again being produced in the central highlands of Madagascar. In the 1990s, a group of Merina weavers based in Antananarivo began to create silk textiles, often replicating historic nineteenth-century designs of textiles in museum collections, such as the British Museum. The extraordinary example here was made by Imerina master Martin Rakotoarimanana in 1998 as part of this contemporary revival.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the traditional functions of Merina silk textiles.
2. What is the overall effect of scale, color, and pattern? How are the patterns arranged? What shapes are repeated over and over again?
3. Are there any recognizable plant or animal forms within the geometric patterns?
4. Why might contemporary artists want to revive the tradition of weaving Merina silk textiles?

1994

Seydou Keïta 16.9.97

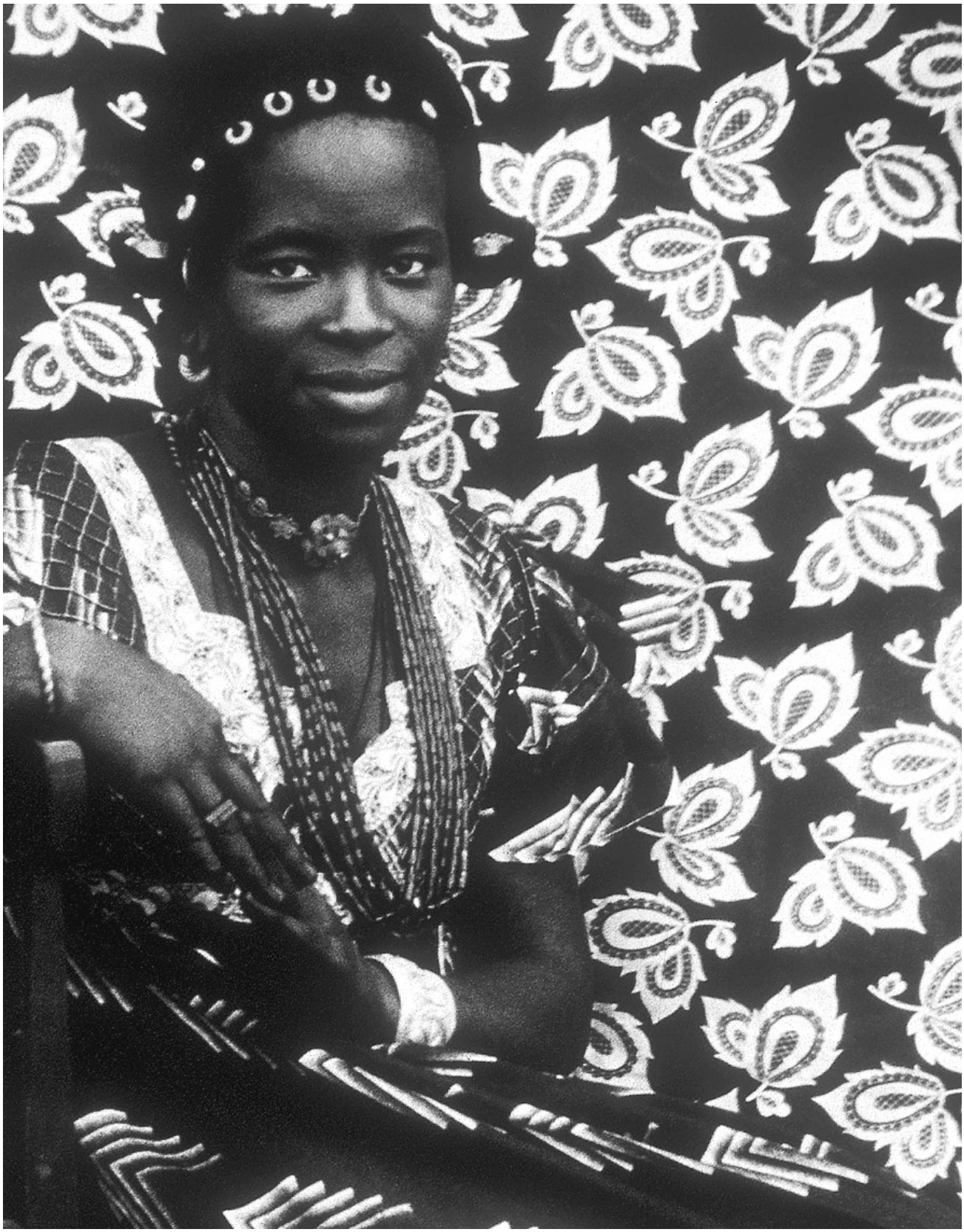
39 Untitled Portrait, 1956–57, printed 1995
Seydou Keïta (1923–2001)
Bamako, Mali
Gelatin silver print; 15 3/8 x 21 3/4 in. (39.1 x 55.2 cm)
Purchase, Joseph and Ceil Mazer Foundation Inc.
Gift, 1997 (1997.364)

Commercial studio portrait photography was introduced in Mali in the 1930s and developed into a thriving industry in Bamako, the capital city, during the postwar period. Bamako's rapid economic development and accompanying population boom fueled demand for photographic portraits. Such photographs were commissioned by members of the growing middle class as mementos to be displayed on the walls of their homes or sent to faraway family members.

Among the busiest portrait studios in Bamako was that of photographer Seydou Keïta. Born in 1923, Keïta originally apprenticed as a carpenter but found his vocational calling when he was given a 6 x 9 Kodak Brownie camera by his uncle. After experimenting on his own, Keïta learned darkroom techniques from two established commercial photographers. He opened his own studio in 1948 in Bamako-Koura, an area of the city whose proximity to a train station and popular marketplace ensured a steady stream of potential clients.

Keïta soon became highly successful as a commercial photographer, producing tens of thousands of portraits over the course of his career. He developed a consistent and recognizable signature style that proved popular with local clients, who requested that their prints include a stamp with Keïta's name. A typical sitting took place during the day in his outside courtyard and could last up to an hour. Keïta gave his sitters the opportunity to individualize their portraits, helping them select a flattering pose and offering a variety of accessories as props. He posed his clients against a printed cloth, which often resulted in vibrant juxtapositions between the patterns of the sitter's clothes and that of the backdrop. Other compositional strategies included the use of a shallow depth of field and an emphasis on repetition and symmetry in framing his subject.

In this portrait, a woman reclines on her side with a relaxed and self-possessed dignity. The tight cropping places the focus entirely on the sitter, while the camera angle makes her appear on a slightly tilted slope, creating a symmetrical composition. The floral print of the woman's boubou (a traditional form of dress) contrasts with the bold black and white checkered blanket in the foreground and the swirling arabesques of the cloth backdrop, creating a syncopated clash of patterns and rhythms. Her dress and pose communicate significant aspects of her identity, revealing how traditional concepts of portraiture are maintained and modified through the medium of photography. Her head wrap is worn in a trendy style called "à la Gaulle," its jaunty angle framing the scarification marks of ethnic affiliation that she bears on her forehead. She rests her left arm casually at her waist, dangling her long slender fingers, which are considered a sign of high social standing.



When Mali won independence from France in 1962, Keïta was offered a position as official government photographer, where he remained until 1977. His governmental responsibilities required him to close his studio in 1964 and he never reopened his portrait practice, although he did continue his photography. Beginning in the 1990s, Keïta's work was included in several exhibitions in the United States and Europe, bringing him considerable fame in the international art world.

Discussion Questions

1. Do the many patterns enhance or detract our ability to focus on the sitter?
2. In what ways does this artwork combine traditional and modern culture?
3. How is a portrait such as this a collaboration between the photographer and the sitter?

40 Untitled (Vessel), 1997
Magdalene Odundo (b. 1950)
Red clay; H. 19 3/4 in. (50.2 cm)
Purchase, The Katcher Family Foundation Inc. Gift, and Gift of Susan Dwight Bliss, by exchange, 1998 (1998.328)

The contemporary ceramic vessels of Kenyan-born artist Magdalene Odundo embody the diverse formal and functional sources that have inspired the artist. Initially trained as a graphic artist, Odundo moved in 1971 to London and enrolled as a student at the Royal College of Art. An interest in the possibilities of clay as a medium led her to return to Africa to study various pottery-making techniques in Nigeria and Kenya. There, she observed women potters hand-building and firing vessels using techniques passed down for generations. Odundo also examined the pottery traditions of San Ildefonso Pueblo in New Mexico, where women produce highly polished blackware ceramics.

Fig. 11. Magdelene Odundo working in her studio. Photograph by Stephen Brayne.

While absorbing these experiences, Odundo has developed her own technique and style. Like traditional potters, she hand-builds her vessel, shaping the clay without the aid of a potter's wheel (fig. 11). When the clay has dried, she burnishes the vessel, covers it with slip, and burnishes it again. Initial firing in a gas kiln results in an orange-red color. Vessels are often fired again, this time using wood fuel in an oxygen-reduced atmosphere, imparting a surface that is partially or completely blackened.

Odundo's vessels may be described as variations on a theme, in which subtle modifications of form have great aesthetic impact. Certain shapes—a swelling bowl, nipple-like protrusions—are suggestive of the female body. This long-necked vessel has softly bulging contours that express a sense of fullness. Dramatic **striations** of color are the unexpected result of the unpredictable nature of Odundo's firing technique.

Please see also a nine-minute video, *Ceramic Gestures: A Conversation with Magdalene Odundo*, produced in conjunction with the exhibition *Ceramic Gestures: New Vessels by Magdalene Odundo*. (For complete information on this video, see the Videography in the Resources section.)

Discussion Questions

1. What do the curving shapes suggest?
2. What are some techniques an artist can use when working in clay to create such shapes? What level of skill does an artist need to achieve this?
3. What is the effect of the color?

Lesson Plan

Animals in African Art

Level

Upper elementary and middle school

Objectives

1. Students will identify examples of animal symbolism.
2. Students will look at and discuss works of art from Africa that embody animal symbolism.
3. Students will research an animal from the African continent and identify its traits, characteristics, and powers.
4. Students will create a work of art combining the characteristics and powers of two or more of these animals.

Materials

Nature magazines, photographs of animals
Construction paper
Drawing paper and pencils, paint, and paintbrushes
Clay

Images

Image 5	Male and Female Antelope Headdresses
Image 6	Komo Headdress
Image 14	Linguist Staff
Image 16	Buffalo (see also the poster of this page)
Image 19	Helmet Mask
Image 23	Shrine

Introduction

Ask the students to look in newspapers and magazines (and through their clothing) to find visual examples of animals used as symbols (advertising, sports, government agencies, corporations, stores, etc.) and bring them to class. Discuss the animals and what they represent. For example, the eagle appears on some quarters as a symbol of the United States. Eagles is also the name of a Philadelphia football team. Ask the students what comes to mind when they think of each of the following:

lion	tiger	eagle
hawk	ram	jaguar
owl	lamb	mouse
elephant	donkey	blue jay

What features and abilities do these animals have that might stand for certain powers or might be metaphors for certain human characteristics, whether virtues or vices? Try to list at least ten. (For example, quiet as a mouse; stubborn as a donkey.)

Discussion of the Art

From the list of images on the prior page, choose works of art to project and discuss with the students. What animal or animals are represented in each work of art? Why did the artists choose these particular creatures? What skills, abilities, or powers do they symbolically express? In African art, animals may symbolize danger, power, wisdom, and transformation. The entire animal, selected parts of the animal, or combinations of animals and humans may be represented. Composite creatures contain the forces and attributes of many creatures and therefore are believed to have extraordinary powers.

Activity

The following activity could be part of a science/art class collaboration.

Make a list of animals of Africa that appear in this resource:

aardvark	elephant	mudfish
antelope	frog	snake
buffalo	leopard	spider
bird	lizard	

Have students choose an animal from the list to research on the Internet and in the library. They should create a small poster with the animal's picture and a list of its characteristics and special abilities (for example: runs fast, has camouflage, etc.). Display the student posters in the classroom or have students present their findings orally. Which animal characteristics would they most like to have?

Have students choose two or three animals from the class poster display. They may also choose different parts from each animal based on traits that they would like to combine. For example, the antelope's speed, the frog's camouflage, the bird's wings. With paper and pencil, they should sketch the animals and experiment with combining parts to form a composite creature. When they are satisfied with the results, they may create their own work of art incorporating their combination animal—a headdress, staff, clay figure, mask, altar shrine, or container. They may draw, paint, or sculpt the object in clay.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Social Studies/Art: Study animal symbols in works of art from other cultures: ancient Egypt, Assyria, Peru, India, medieval Europe.

Resources

The African Wildlife Foundation, www.awf.org.

Resources for Educators published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Art of Ancient Egypt: A *Resource for Educators* (Edith W. Watts. New York: MMA, 1998)—discussion of gods and goddesses.

The Arts of Korea: A *Resource for Educators* (Elizabeth Hammer, edited by Judith G. Smith. New York: MMA, 2002)—Korean rank badge lesson plan.

The Art of South and Southeast Asia: A *Resource for Educators* (Steven M. Kossak and Edith W. Watts. New York: MMA, 2001)—animal lesson plan.

Medieval Art: A *Resource for Educators* (Michael Norris. New York: MMA, 2005)—bestiary lesson plan.

The Royal Art of Benin: A *Resource for Educators from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York* (Edith Watts, et al. New York: MMA, 1994)—discussion of animals.

These publications (except for the *The Royal Art of Benin*) may also be downloaded from the Museum's website at www.metmuseum.org/explore/classroom.asp. They are also available in the Museum's Library and Teacher Resource Center in the Uris Center for Education.

Assessment

What animal symbols did students incorporate into their composition or object? Why? How successful were they in combining the physical and symbolic qualities of each animal? How do these qualities relate to the object they have created? Ask the students to write a story about the object they created and its special powers.

Lesson Plan

The Power Behind the Throne

Level

Upper elementary, middle, and high school

Objectives

1. Students will identify symbolic imagery in an African chair and stool.
2. Students will discuss the function of art to represent rank, power, and status.
3. Students will design and construct their own throne or power chair.

Materials

Chair or stool (options):

- Construct a plywood chair or stool with large surfaces that can be painted, making it a permanent work of art
- Purchase an inexpensive chair or stool at a thrift shop or yard sale and modify it
- Borrow a school chair or stool and temporarily decorate it with cardboard, paper, and tape

Poster board and cardboard
Paints
Masking or duct tape
Upholstery tacks

Images

Image 31 Chair
Image 34 Stool

Supplemental images related to power:

Image 12 Ceremonial Ladle
Image 14 Linguist Staff
Image 16 Buffalo
Image 18 Veranda Post
Image 22 Plaque: Oba on Horseback (see also the poster of this image)
Image 25 Figure of a Chief

Introduction

Place the chair at the front of the classroom. Discuss how chairs can represent status, prestige, and power (perhaps mention the term "chairman"). In many cultures, the ruler sits on a special throne that may be an elaborate work of art, made of luxurious materials using time-consuming techniques. It may be larger or higher than ordinary chairs, decorated with symbols and insignia to represent rank and authority. Such chairs might not only serve as seats for the powerful ruler, but may also be a source of power themselves. They may require special care, and only be used during special events and ceremonies.

Discussion of the Art

Project images 31 and 34 and ask the students to describe how the artists conveyed rank, status, and power. (See the Comparisons for Classroom Discussion folder on the CD-ROM for easy projection of this pair.) What features identify the chair and stool as special places to sit? Discuss how the artist has adapted the female figure to be a support for the stool. What does she represent? Describe the pose and facial expression—what parts of the body are emphasized and what might that symbolize? Most traditional African rulers sat on stools. Discuss how the Chokwe chiefs were introduced to the European chair form and how they incorporated it into their own traditions. Why would a chief want scenes of daily and ritual life carved onto a chair?

Project the supplemental images and further discuss how the artists convey rank, status, and power in the works of art.

Activity

Explain that the students will create a class chair. Ask them to think about the figures depicted on the chair and stool (images 31 and 34). Have them identify notable figures from history, their community, and their families whom they respect and would wish to depict on a chair that represents power and authority. What rituals and special ceremonies might be included on a chair? Collaborate on a list of possibilities and refine the list—for example, use a generic grandmother figure to represent everyone's grandmother, or a ceremony from each season to represent the entire year. Decide where the figures and scenes should be positioned—who should support the chair (to symbolize strength) and who should be depicted near the sitter's head (to convey wisdom)? What other symbols might be added (such as animals, plants, special objects) to fill the rest of the surfaces? The chair itself can be altered; for example, place cardboard against the back of the chair to make it larger or higher.

Divide the class into smaller groups and assign each group one section of the chair. First, the groups should measure their area and sketch out a design on paper. They should then check in with the larger group and make changes based on input from the group. The designs may be transferred and painted directly on

the chair or painted onto poster board and/or cardboard that can be wrapped around the legs and taped in place, attached to the back and sides, etc. Various techniques (collage, painting, paper sculpture, papier mâché) may be used. A design of upholstery tacks can also be driven into the wood (see image 31).

Assessment

Assign each student a day that they may use the chair in the classroom. Certain privileges decided upon by the class in advance may be conferred upon the sitter. Ask each student to write a short paragraph about how he or she felt when sitting on the chair and what the images on the chair meant to them. Collect these impressions into a scrapbook or binder, including photographs, if desired. Invite guests (parents, other faculty, etc.) to the classroom to sit on the chair and record their impressions for the book as well.

Lesson Plan

The Human Figure and Abstraction

Level

Upper elementary and middle school

Objectives

1. Students will look at examples of the human face and form in African art.
2. Students will identify how features and parts of the body can be abstracted into geometric shapes or solids.
3. Students will experiment with abstraction by creating a figure or head with geometric shapes or solids.

Materials

Markers or crayons
Clay
Paper and scissors
Glue

Images

Faces

Image 20 Head of an Oba
Image 15 Memorial Head
Image 11 Mende Helmet Mask

Figures

Image 1 Seated Figure
Image 18 Veranda Post
Image 29 Seated Figure

Introduction

Ask one or two students to volunteer to have their bodies outlined on large sheets of paper that can be displayed at the front of the class. Using a marker or dark crayon, identify and outline geometric shapes in the figure: rectangles, triangles, ovals, etc. Add facial features, if desired, using geometric shapes. Next, label parts of the body with a concept that each might symbolize—head: intelligence; hands and fingers: skill; eyes: observation; legs: strength. How can anatomical features be changed to emphasize these ideas? Larger eyes, longer fingers, wider shoulders are some of the possibilities. What about pose and posture? Ask the students to look at examples of cartoons and works of art that exaggerate certain parts of the body. How do these figures compare with the outlined figure?

Older students: Choose a selection of representations of the human body from different time periods and cultures (refer to the Metropolitan Museum's collections online [www.metmuseum/worksofart] or the *Timeline of Art History* [www.metmuseum.org/toah]; or see the resources for educators listed below). Discuss how facial features and expressions, the scale of the figure as well as its proportions, pose, and gesture are represented. Also look at representations in popular culture, including cartoons, posters, advertising, etc.

Discussion of the Art

Project the images listed on the prior page, which show human faces or figures in African art. Notice the naturalistic features and the more abstract ones. Ask the students to find examples of geometric shapes and forms, including ovals, circles, squares, spheres, cubes, etc. Discuss the effect of simplifying and abstracting forms and its relationship to African concepts of beauty. What details have been added to the simplified forms? How does this individualize the figures? Look at the expression on the faces and the poses of the figures. Are there any features or parts of the body that are exaggerated or more prominent? What might this mean?

Activity

Distribute clay or construction paper. Have the students use geometric shapes or forms to design and construct a human face or figure. They may exaggerate the parts of the face and body to represent certain attributes like wisdom, speed, skill, imagination, dependability, or strength.

Resources

The Art of Renaissance Europe: A *Resource for Educators* (Bosiljka Raditsa et al. New York: MMA, 2000)—the human figure.

20th-Century Art: A *Resource for Educators* (Stella Paul. New York: MMA, 1999)—figural abstraction, Amedeo Modigliani, Willem de Kooning.

The Art of Ancient Egypt: A *Resource for Educators* (Edith W. Watts. New York: MMA, 1998)—depiction of the human figure.

The Art of South and Southeast Asia: A *Resource for Educators* (Steven M. Kossak and Edith W. Watts. New York: MMA, 2001)—figural sculpture.

These publications (except for *20th-Century Art*) may be downloaded from the Museum's website at www.metmuseum.org/explore/classroom.asp. They are also available in the Museum's Library and Teacher Resource Center in the Uris Center for Education.

Assessment

Display the finished artwork. How well did the students incorporate abstraction into their paper or clay figure? Did they emphasize any particular features?

Lesson Plan

African Art: Materials and Techniques

Level

Elementary and middle school

Objectives

1. Students will discuss the geography and ecology of sub-Saharan Africa.
2. Students will work with materials, techniques, and concepts associated with African art.

Materials

Terracotta or red clay, self-hardening or fire clay
Raffia
Beads, shells (or other embellishments)
Printed fabrics
Burlap and yarn
Colored tissue paper
Plastic flowerpot, empty and clean plastic water bottle, or cardboard box
Papier mâché

Images

Textiles

Image 33 Prestige Panel
Image 36 Apron
Image 38 Textile Mantle

Clay

Image 1 Seated Figure
Image 15 Memorial Head
Image 40 Untitled (Vessel)

Multimedia

Image 26 Palm-Wine Container

Introduction

The following activity could be part of a social studies/art class collaboration.

Display a map of Africa and assign students different regions in sub-Saharan Africa to research, identifying climate, geography, plants, animals, and other resources. Do these regions have contacts through trade with other parts of the world? Attach labels, stickers, photos, etc., to the areas around the map and string to indicate trade routes.

Discussion of the Art

Choose a selection of images listed on the prior page and ask students to identify the materials and techniques used to make them. Use the map of Africa to locate where each object originated. Were the materials native to this region or were they imported; for example, silk, raffia, gourds, beads? What technologies are needed to produce each object? In the case of the textiles, looms must be constructed to weave the fibers; clay objects must be fired in a kiln. What kinds of designs are on each object? If geometric patterns are used, do they have any symbolism? What surface embellishment decorates each object?

After looking at the works of art, students may wish to add more details to their map of Africa.

Activity

Ask students to bring materials to class, some for their own use and some to trade with other students. These could include beads, feathers, shells, fake fur, printed fabrics, and yarn. Order additional materials to supplement the items that the students bring in. The finished project can be a decorated piece of cloth, container, clay figure, or mask.

Textiles: Show students the Kuba textile (image 33). Distribute 12 x 12 inch squares of neutral-colored (tan, brown, black) burlap fabric, large plastic needles, and contrasting yarn (tan, brown, black). Demonstrate simple embroidery stitches—running stitches, back stitch, etc.—and show students how the open weave of the burlap can be used to chart a geometric design using stitches that run vertically, horizontally, or diagonally. Have students embroider a pattern that fills their square. They may wish to add beads, shells, a raffia fringe, or other embellishment to their textile.

Clay: Use self-hardening or terracotta fire clay to construct a figure, head, or vessel. Students may use coil and slab methods to build their object, then incise details and decorative patterns into the clay while it is still damp. After drying or firing, the object may be embellished with additional objects, a string of beads, cloth, or raffia, etc.

Multimedia: Ask students to bring a plastic water bottle, plastic flower pot, margarine tub, or other container to school. Using papier mâché, they should cover their container, changing the shape if they wish. When the papier mâché

is dry, they can paint it with a base coat. Then, using a pencil eraser dipped in paint, they should stipple an allover design to simulate beads, covering the entire surface of the container. They may apply other decorations (like beads, yarn, shells, or fabric) with glue. If beads are not available, they can roll small pieces of colored tissue paper into wads and glue them to the surface.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Social Studies/Geography: Incorporate this activity into a study of Africa, its climate, ecology, regions, plants, animals, and natural resources. Identify materials used in the works of art that originate in Africa and others that are imported. Identify animals and their symbolism.

Resources

Medieval Art: A Resource for Educators (Michael Norris. New York: MMA, 2005)—materials and techniques lesson plan.

The Arts of Korea: A Resource for Educators (Elizabeth Hammer, edited by Judith G. Smith. New York: MMA, 2002)—clay lesson plan.

These publications may be downloaded from the Museum's website at www.metmuseum.org/explore/classroom.asp. They are also available in the Museum's Library and Teacher Resource Center in the Uris Center for Education.

Assessment

Display the finished objects. How well did the students use the materials and techniques to create their own works of art? Were they able to organize patterns, geometric shapes, and applied embellishment in a pleasing way?

Lesson Plan

Art and the Cycles of Life

Level

Elementary, middle, and high school

Objectives

1. Younger students will identify roles of family members and look at African figures of men and women.
2. Older students will identify notable events in the cycle of life, and look at African artworks designed to symbolize or accompany these stages.
3. Students will create their own work of art, a family grouping or an object designed to accompany a transitional event in their own life.

Younger Students

Materials

Clay
Paper, pencils, crayons, paints

Images

Image 4	Mother and Child / Seated Male with Lance
Image 7	Ancestral Couple
Image 13	Pair of Figures

Introduction

Have the students bring in photographs of their family. Discuss the ages of the family members and the role that each plays in the family—working outside the home, cooking meals, doing chores, taking care of pets.

Discussion of the Art

Show students the images of couples listed above. Ask them to describe the figures, their scale, poses, the parts of the body that are emphasized, and/or what each figure is holding. How do these relate to the role of the figure? What features (jewelry, hats) might reflect the status of each figure?

Activity

Have the students sketch their family members or sculpt them in clay, making sure that each person's role is identified by his or her clothing, objects, or pose.

Older Students

Materials

Mixed media

Images

Image 3	Mask and Hood (funeral)
Image 8	Mask (coming of age)
Image 11	Mende Helmet Mask (coming of age)
Image 13	Pair of Figures (adulthood)
Image 15	Memorial Head (memorializing the deceased)
Image 27	Reliquary Figure (honoring ancestors)

Introduction

Ask the students to think of the transitional events that have occurred in their families—a birth, wedding, birthday, first day of school, graduation, death of a loved one. How are these events marked through rituals, gifts, and special objects? For example, a wake is held for people to share memories of a deceased relative; a christening includes symbolic gifts to the baby like a silver cup or spoon; specially designed cakes are served at weddings and graduation parties.

Discussion of the Art

Why are life transitions important and how have African people marked these transitions? Project the images listed above and discuss the stage of life that each object represents, the ceremonies and rituals that accompany it (image 3: funeral; image 8: coming of age; image 11: coming of age; image 13: adulthood; image 15: memorializing the deceased; image 27: honoring ancestors). Students should think of the roles of men and women, young and old, and the cultural traditions in their community. How and why are ancestors commemorated?

Activity

Choose an individual transition or a special event, such as graduation, to commemorate in a work of art. Students may wish to honor a recently deceased family member by creating a remembrance object or container.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Visual Art: A class might wish to commemorate their graduation to another school or transition to another stage of life by creating a work of art to leave as a gift; for example, a mural, a special memory book with photographs and drawings, etc. Discuss other ways peoples of Africa, as well as other cultures, celebrate transitions in life. Consider poetry, music, song, and dance.

Resources

The Art of Renaissance Europe: A *Resource for Educators* (Bosiljka Raditsa et al. New York: MMA, 2000)—individual, family, society, world at large.

The Art of Ancient Egypt: A *Resource for Educators* (Edith W. Watts. New York: MMA, 1998)—funerary art.

Medieval Art: A *Resource for Educators* (Michael Norris. New York: MMA, 2005)—reliquaries.

A *Masterwork of African Art*: *The Dogon Couple—Activities for Learning* (Edith W. Watts, Alice W. Schwarz, and Rose Tejada. New York: MMA, 2002).

These publications (except for A *Masterwork of African Art*: *The Dogon Couple*) may be downloaded from the Museum's website at www.metmuseum.org/explore/classroom.asp. They are also available in the Museum's Library and Teacher Resource Center in the Uris Center for Education.

Assessment

How well did younger students represent the different age groups and stages of life of their families in their artwork? Were their roles defined by the use of symbolic imagery or objects?

How well did older students understand the concept of transitional events in their lives and represent them through a symbolic object?

Lesson Plan

Masks and Headdresses

Level

Elementary and middle school

Objectives

1. Students will look at and discuss African masks made for a variety of purposes.
2. Students will create a mask to represent a particular ceremony or event.

Materials

Cardboard, poster board
Raffia, yarn
Paint, markers

Images

Image 3	Mask and Hood
Image 5	Male and Female Antelope Headdresses
Image 6	Komo Headdress
Image 8	Mask (see also the poster of this image)
Image 10	Headdress
Image 11	Mende Helmet Mask
Image 19	Helmet Mask
Image 24	Janus-Faced Headdress
Image 32	Mask

Introduction

Think of reasons why masks are created and worn, including performances, ceremonies, holidays, didactic purposes, and for disguise and transformation. Students may have seen masks in a museum; can they be considered art? Why or why not? Since masks are worn by people, how do clothing and movement affect the wearing of the mask? What is the effect of a mask in performance, when accompanied by dancing, singing, instruments, special lighting?

Discussion of the Art

Select three or four images from the list above to show the students. What materials can the students identify? What or who might the mask represent? Is it a human face, an animal, a combination of animals? Does it incorporate geometric forms? Who wears the mask? What abstract or concrete ideas are embodied in the mask—forces of the spirit world, protection, ideal behavior? Discuss how masks

are used in ceremonies and rites. Read the descriptions of the images you have selected and discuss the additional costume elements worn by the performer as well as the function of the performance.

Activity

Ask the students to design a mask for a specific ceremony, ritual, or time of year. After choosing the purpose of the mask, they should make a list of three or four objects or features that will illustrate the idea, then sketch a design that combines these elements. The use of abstraction, patterns, metaphor, and embellishment can be simple or complex, depending on the age group.

Distribute cardboard, construction paper, or poster board in different colors, and have students construct their mask or headdress, attaching additional cardboard to make the mask three-dimensional. They may paint all or part of the mask, or attach raffia, yarn, beads, shells, fabric, twigs, etc.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Dance/Drama: Ask the students to design a costume to wear with their mask and/or to choreograph a dance or movement. They may add music or percussion sounds to accompany their performance.

Resources

You may want to view the video on the DVD included in this resource. Several segments show masks performed as part of a variety of celebrations in Africa.

Assessment

How well did the students incorporate a particular idea of an abstract concept, event, or ritual into their mask? Have the students wear their masks (and they may incorporate sounds, music, movement, dance, and additional costume elements) and see if the rest of the class can guess for what purpose the mask was created.

Comparisons for Classroom Discussion

The comparisons in this section offer an opportunity for effective classroom discussion, which will enable students to discern the distinctive features of the works of art. These comparisons are also available on the enclosed CD for projection in the classroom.

Image 3
Mask and Hood

Image 19
Helmet Mask

- How are these masks different? Are there similarities between them?
- Discuss geometric/circular shapes.
- Note surfaces, patterns, textures, and the effect of projections.

Image 7
Ancestral Couple

Image 13
Pair of Figures

- What is different about these couples?
- What ideas does each pair express? How are they shown?
- What forms suggest movement?

Image 15
Memorial Head

Image 21
Pendant Mask

- How are these heads different?
- Discuss abstract forms versus naturalistic ones.
- What details symbolize identity?

Image 31
Chair

Image 34
Stool

- Compare and contrast these seats. (Please note relative dimensions of each; see description pages.)
- Discuss symbols of status and power.
- What is unusual about the female figure?

Image 22
Plaque: Oba on Horseback

Image 37
Page from an Illuminated Gospel

- What is different? What is similar?
- Discuss the use of scale and balance.
- How is power expressed?

Image 9
Lidded Saltcellar

Image 26
Palm-Wine Container

- What features identify luxury?
- Note the patterns as decoration and symbol.
- Note the functions of each of these containers.

Image 17
Figure

Image 30
Power Figure

- What features do these figures share?
- What do the added materials and rough surfaces symbolize?
- Discuss the function of each figure.

Glossary

adze	an axlike tool for dressing wood, etc., with a curved blade at right angles to the handle.
ancestor	one from whom a person is descended and who is usually more remote in the line of descendants than a grandparent.
artifact	a man-made object.
caryatid	a supporting column that has the form of a female figure.
celebration	a festival or observation of special activities.
chiefdom	a region or group of people ruled by a chief.
civilization	a relatively high level of cultural and technological development; the cultural characteristic of a particular time and place.
coiffure	a style or manner of arranging the hair.
culture	the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon human capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.
custom	a way of doing things that is passed on to each generation.
dialect	a variety of language used by a group, with vocabulary and grammar that distinguish it from other varieties used by other groups.
diviner	a person with the power to use invocation and manipulation of spiritual entities, potent objects, and herbal mixtures to intercede with the gods on behalf of the people.
environment	the outside forces that surround and affect a person or population.
figurative	an artwork that represents recognizable images.
iconography	the traditional or conventional images or symbols associated with a subject, especially a religious or legendary subject.

kaolin	a fine white clay.
lineage	direct descent from an ancestor.
lost-wax	a casting process using a wax model that is encased in a molding material (such as sand or plaster), then melted away leaving a hollow mold for the metal cast; this technique was developed independently in every continent except Australasia and is widespread in West Africa.
masquerade	a social gathering of persons wearing masks and often fantastical costumes.
matrilineal	designating kinship or derivation through the mother instead of the father.
naturalistic	an object made or sculpted to conform to nature.
potsherd	a piece or fragment of earthenware or pot that is made of fired or baked clay.
quatrefoil	a representation of a flower with four petals, or a leaf that has four leaflets.
raffia	the fiber of the raffia palm, used especially for making baskets and hats.
regalia	the emblems, symbols, or paraphernalia indicative of royalty.
relief	a term applied to sculpture that projects from a background surface rather than standing freely.
reliquary	a container or shrine in which relics or objects of related importance are kept.
ritual	a set form or system of rites, religious or otherwise.
scarification	patterns incised, scratched, or cut into the skin, which may signify a person's status, accomplishments, or ideal of beauty.
steatite	a variety of soapstone used for sculpting.
striation	an arrangement of stripes or lines distinguished from the surrounding area by color, texture, or elevation.
stylized	conforming to a style rather than conforming to nature or tradition.
symbolic	representing a certain idea, symbol, or belief.
terracotta	a hard, fired but unglazed clay ranging in color from pink to purple-red but typically brownish red, used especially for sculpture and pottery.

thermoluminescence	a geological method used for dating, especially objects made of clay.
veneration	respect or awe inspired by the dignity, wisdom, dedication, or talent of a person.
warp	yarn that extends lengthwise to form threads of a woven fabric.
weft	yarn or thread that crosses the warp.

Pronunciation Guide

This guide offers approximate pronunciations for selected African words and names mentioned in this publication.

adun koro	AH-doon KOH-roh
akotofahana	ah-KOH-toh-FAH-nah
Ase	AH-sheh
Baga	BAH-gah
Bamana	BAH-mah-nah
Bangwa	BAHN-gwah
Baule	BAU-leh
Benin	Beh-NEEN
bocio	BOH-choh
bokonon	boh-koh-NON
Buli	BOO-lee
Chokwe	CHOK-weh
ci wara	chee-WAH-rah
Dahomey	da-hoh-MEH
dama	DAH-mah
Djenne-jeno	DJEH-neh-JEH-noh
D'mba	dm-BAH
Dogon	doh-GOHN
Edo	EH-doh
Ejagham	eh-JAH-gahm
Fon	FOHN(G)
Gabon	gah-BOHN(G)
Gelede	GEH-leh-deh
Gwandusu	gwahn-DOO-soo
Gwantigi	gwahn-TEE-gee
ifiri	ee-FEE-ree
Ijo	EE-joh
ijogolo	ee-JOH-goh-loh
iwa	EE-wah
I*yoba*	ee-YOH-bah
kanaga	KAH-nah-gah
lefem	LEH-fem
Mangbetu	mahng-BEH-too

mbala	m-BAH-lah
Ndebele	en-deh-BEH-leh
nkhanda	n-KAHN-da
nkisi	n-KEE-see
nkondi	n-KON-dee
nsibidi	n-SEE-bee-dee
nwantantay	n-WAHN-tahn-tay
Oba	OH-bah
okyeame	oh-kee-AH-meh
Olowe of Ise	OH-loh-weh of EE-seh
oriki	oh-REE-kee
Sande	SAHN-deh
Senufo	Suh-NOO-foh
Seydou Keïta	SAY-doo KAY-tah
We	WEH
wunkirle	woon-KEER-leh
Yaka	YAH-kah
Yoruba	YOH-roo-bah

Introduction to the Video

Many Bamana communities in Mali bring to life the mythical origins of agriculture in rituals and festivities that either launch or conclude the farming season. They celebrate the mythic progenitor of agriculture, Ci Wara. The video highlights featured on the enclosed DVD draw upon footage of a dozen performances recorded by five different observers between 1970 and 2002. They show a number of headdresses performed that are similar to some featured in this resource (see images 5 and 6).

The dancers are members of community youth associations that sponsor annual festivals. These celebrations are a communal call to labor that encourages members to prepare for the hand plowing that is necessary before the planting season begins with the coming of the rains. The first segment shows a rite performed by a *ci wara* official. The series of ritualized gestures he enacts invoke the process whereby farmers make the earth receptive for new life that is fed by rain from the heavens.

Although *ci wara* headdresses are always danced by male performers, they generally appear in male and female pairs. The dancers' movements are a series of side-to-side undulations of the body and an up-and-down movement of the head that at once invoke tilling actions and motions of various symbolic animals. They often begin by circling the perimeter of the dance arena once together before the tempo of the performance intensifies. At that time they may alternate as soloists. Female members of the youth associations also provide essential encouragement and vital energy to the event, serving as both chorus and attendants to the male actors; some fan the *ci wara* performer to cool him down.

C*i wara* performances have been shaped by continual innovation. In many instances, the repertory has been expanded with additional masquerade genres. Among these is *nama koroni koun*, a playful trickster figure. N*ama koroni koun*, or "little hyena head," provides comedic intervals between appearances of the *ci wara* by running around trying to steal objects from the spectators. Sometimes he enters the arena with items that he has "stolen" from people's homes and proceeds to redistribute this bounty to assembled members of the community. Another variation of this character inspired by the hyena—an animal that in Bamana culture embodies imperfect knowledge and deviousness—is *nama tye tye*. This dynamic interlude features a short swift dance whose zigzag trajectory is said to represent the spiral motions of heavenly bodies.

Running time: 11 minutes

Video Segment Credits

C*i* W*ara* Invocation

Jiminjan village, Kolokani district, Mali,
February 7, 1976
Camera: Dr. James Brink, courtesy of the Human Studies
Film Archives, Smithsonian Institution
Audio: original to performance

C*i* W*ara* headdresses

Segou region, Mali, 1970
Camera: Dr. Pascal James Imperato
Audio: P. J. Imperato, Segou region, ca. 1970

Mali, 1972
B*end of the* N*iger* (16mm); director, Eliot Elisofon
Audio: P. J. Imperato, Segou region, ca. 1970

S*ogoni* K*oun* headdresses

Bougouni, Mali, 1972
B*end of the* N*iger* (16mm); director, Eliot Elisofon
Audio: from B*end of the* N*iger* (see above)

Djitoumou region, Mali, 1971
Camera: Dr. Pascal James Imperato
Audio: from B*end of the* N*iger* (see above)

N'*gonzon* K*oun* headdresses

Jiminjan village, Kolokani district, Mali
February 7, 1976
Camera: Dr. James Brink, courtesy of the Human Studies
Film Archives, Smithsonian Institution
Audio: original to performance

Kita district, Mali, 1971
Camera: Dr. Pascal James Imperato
Audio: P. J. Imperato, Segou region, ca. 1970

Djitoumou region, Mali, 1970
Camera: Dr. Pascal James Imperato
Audio: J. Brink, Kolokani district, 1976

Djitoumou region, Mali, 1969
Camera: Dr. Pascal James Imperato
Audio: J. Brink, Kolokani district, 1976

Djitoumou region, Mali, 1971
Camera: Dr. Pascal James Imperato
Audio: from B*end of the* N*iger* (see above)

Mande Plateau, Mali, 1993
Camera (8 mm video): Dr. Stephen Wooten
Audio: original to performance

Sirakoro Meguetana, Mali, 2002
Camera: Ard Berge, courtesy of Alisa LaGamma
Audio: P. J. Imperato, Segou region, ca. 1970

N*ama* K*oroni* K*oun* headdresses

Jiminjan village, Kolokani district, Mali
February 7, 1976
Camera: Dr. James Brink
Audio: original to performance

Djitoumou region, Mali, 1970
Camera: Dr. Pascal James Imperato
Audio: S. Wooten, Mande Plateau, 1993

Selected Resources for Further Information

Bacquart, Jean-Baptiste. *The Tribal Arts of Africa*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 1998.
This book, divided into 49 sections focusing on the major tribes in the various cultural areas of sub-Saharan Africa, discusses art in the context of the politics and society of each particular region. Copiously illustrated, the book is structured so the reader can readily compare and contrast the art; includes bibliographies, a glossary, and index.

Berzock, Kathleen Bickford, Edith Watts, and Emily Hanna-Vergara. *Masks of Africa in the Permanent Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Guide to the Poster*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994.
This booklet explains the functions that masks perform in many African societies. Includes bibliographical references and classroom activities. (This publication is available only in the Museum's Library and Teacher Resource Center.)

Blier, Suzanne Preston. *The Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form*. Perspectives series. New York: Abrams, 1998.
Blier explores the arts of Central and West African monarchies with special attention to palaces, regalia, ceremonies, and processions. This book is geared to specialists and general readers alike. A timeline, glossary, bibliography, and index enhance the text.

Garlake, Peter. *Early Art and Architecture of Africa*. Oxford History of Art series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
Garlake surveys the art and architecture of Africa from the earliest rock painting to the time of the first European contacts and provides a fascinating overview by region of the entire continent and its art. The text is illustrated with numerous photographs, line drawings, maps, and diagrams; includes an index and bibliographic references.

Garrard, Timothy F. *Gold of Africa: Jewellery and Ornaments from Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Senegal in the Collection of the Barbier-Mueller Museum*. Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1989.
This richly illustrated book is a readable, in-depth look at the gold and goldsmithing of sub-Saharan West Africa. Includes an index.

Gillow, John. *African Textiles*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003.
The variety and vastness of African textiles and their production techniques are fully realized in this abundantly illustrated survey. A map, index, suggestions for further reading, glossary, and museum list complete the work.

Kasfir, Sidney Littlefield. *Contemporary African Art*. World of Art series. New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999.
Kasfir has written an excellent and readable overview of post-1950 sub-Saharan art; includes many illustrations, a map, bibliography, and index.

LaGamma, Alisa. *Genesis: Ideas of Origin in African Sculpture*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002.
This beautifully illustrated exhibition catalogue eloquently reveals the universality of creation myths. LaGamma has paid particular attention to the carved *ci wara* headdresses of the Bamana peoples of Mali. Includes bibliographic references.

_____. *Echoing Images: Couples in African Sculpture*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004.
In another superbly illustrated exhibition catalogue, LaGamma examines the concept of relationships and duality necessary to all humans as expressed in sub-Saharan African sculpture. Includes bibliographic references.

Oliver, Roland, and Anthony Atmore. *Africa Since 1800*. 5th ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
A panoramic survey of the continent's modern history, told in a straightforward manner. A brief introduction to the pre-1800 period is followed by a discussion of precolonial and colonial times; then more than one third of the book is devoted to the postcolonial period from the 1920s to 2003. Many maps enhance the discussion. A bibliography and index are included.

_____. *Medieval Africa, 1250–1800*. Rev. ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
This remarkable volume examines the diverse environmental conditions that have shaped Africa's history, alongside European explorations and Christian and Arab penetrations into the continent. Many maps enhance the text. Includes a bibliography and index.

Parrinder, Geoffrey. *African Mythology*. Library of the World's Myths and Legends series. New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1991.
Professor Parrinder's readable introduction to African myths and folklore includes many illustrations, an index, and a bibliography.

Phillips, Tom, ed. *Africa: The Art of a Continent*. Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1999.
This sweeping 615-page exhibition catalogue looks at the entire range of art of the African continent. Includes an index of ethnic groups, extensive illustrations, and a bibliography.

Picton, John, and John Mack. *African Textiles*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.
This is a detailed survey of the process of textile production, from preparation of the raw material to finished product, in various parts of Africa; includes many illustrations, an index, and bibliography.

Ross, Doran H., ed. *Elephant: The Animal and Its Ivory in African Culture*. Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1992.
The African elephant and its role in the life of different cultural groups in sub-Saharan Africa is examined in this remarkable exhibition catalogue bringing a new awareness to the study of ivory; includes an overview of the ivory trade. Stunning photographs throughout and a thorough bibliography enrich the catalogue.

Visonà, Monica Blackmun, et al. *A History of Art in Africa*. New York: Abrams, 2001.
This is a comprehensive art historical look at the arts of the entire continent of Africa from the earliest stone sculpture and rock painting to twentieth-century creations and performances; includes a final chapter on the African diaspora. Striking illustrations, a glossary, annotated bibliography, and index enhance the work.

Vogel, Susan Mullin. *Baule: African Art, Western Eyes*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
Vogel explores the sculpture of the Baule people of Ivory Coast with an inherent sensitivity due to her immersion in their culture. This book is a complete discussion of the various ways the Baule use and think about art. Includes a glossary, checklist, bibliography, and index.

Watts, Edith W., Alice W. Schwarz, and Rosa Tejada. *A Masterwork of African Art: The Dogon Couple*. A Closer Look series. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002.
The sculpture of a seated couple in the Metropolitan Museum is the focus of this teacher resource. A booklet provides background information and activities; includes two posters and a set of puzzle cards.

Watts, Edith, et al. *The Royal Art of Benin: A Resource for Educators from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994.
This resource is a visual guide to the royal court and ceremonies of the kingdom of Benin, which is today a part of Nigeria. Filled with information and activities for students at various levels, the resource also includes a detailed, four-part discovery poster about a royal ancestor tusk, 20 slides, a map, glossary, and bibliography. (This publication is available only in the Museum's Library and Teacher Resource Center.)

Willett, Frank. *African Art*. 3rd rev. ed. World of Art series. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003.
This concise survey of African art, from cave painting to the twentieth century, includes a historiography of the study of African art; many illustrations, an index, and bibliography are also included.

Zaslavsky, Claudia. *Africa Counts: Number and Pattern in African Culture*. 3rd ed. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999.
Zaslavsky has updated her influential investigation of African mathematics. This readable and well-illustrated book was considered a classic in the field of ethnomathematics soon after it was first published in 1973. Diagrams, maps, bibliographical references, and an index supplement the text.

Resources for Students

Bond, George, ed. The Heritage Library of African Peoples series. New York: Rosen Publishing, 1997–.
The series includes: *Asante*, *Chokwe*, *Edo*, *Fang*, *Luba*, *Ndebele*, *Songhay*, and more.
These surveys of the culture, history, and contemporary life of various African peoples include many illustrations, bibliographical references, and an index.

Finley, Carol. *The Art of African Masks: Exploring Cultural Traditions*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1999.
This is a well-illustrated book of many different types of African masks from the various cultural groups of Africa. Includes bibliographical references and an index.

Knappert, Jan. *Kings, Gods & Spirits from African Mythology*. The World Mythologies series. New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1986.
Knappert has recorded African myths and legends passed down from generation to generation. Illustrations enhance the text; includes bibliographical references and an index.

Mitchison, Naomi. *African Heroes*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969.
These eleven stories of real sub-Saharan African heroes tell about conflicts that arose during six centuries of European colonization.

Service, Pamela F. *The Ancient African Kingdom of Kush*. Cultures of the Past series. New York: Benchmark Books, 1998.
This introduction to daily life in an ancient kingdom on the Nile is suitable for readers of all ages. Many illustrations, a chronology, glossary, bibliography, and index enhance the usefulness of this interesting book.

When Hippo Was Hairy and Other Tales from Africa. New York: Barron's, 1988.
The 31 folktales about African animals are accompanied by factual information about each animal. Includes a bibliography and glossary.

Videography

We advise all educators to preview these videos and films before integrating them into lesson plans. Some of these are also available in DVD format.

Africa. National Geographic Television and Thirteen/WNET New York, 2001. 5 videocassettes. (540 min.) NATURE Series. Vol. 1: *Savanna Homecoming / Desert Odyssey*; vol. 2: *Voices of the Forest / Mountains of Faith*; vol. 3: *Love in the Sahel / Restless Waters*; vol. 4: *Leopards of Zanzibar / Southern Treasures*; vol. 5: *The Making of Africa*.
Explores most of the countries and many of the cultures of Africa, a continent that is as diverse in human culture as it is in flora and fauna. Human interest stories give each episode a personal touch. This portrait of life on the continent shows the constant struggles of humans versus nature and traditional culture versus the modern world that epitomize life in Africa. Closed-captioned for the hearing impaired. Vols. 1–4, each 120 min.; vol. 5, 60 min.

African American Art: Past and Present. Wilton, Conn.: Reading & O'Reilly, 1992.
This introductory survey of African American art from the colonial period to the twentieth century is intended for classroom use. Topics covered in Tape 1 (30 min.) are: Africa, Middle Passage, Slavery, Decorative Arts, Improvisation in the Visual Arts, and 18th- and 19th-Century Fine Art Survey. Accompanied by a teacher's guide.

African Art, Women, History: The Luba People of Central Africa. Created and produced by Linda Freeman; written and directed by David Irving. Chappaqua, N.Y.: L&S Video, 1998. (28 min.)
Detailed look at the importance of memory, history, and the role of women in the art of the Luba people of southeastern Zaire.

The Art of the Dogon. Directed by John Goberman and Marc Bauman. The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Chicago: Home Vision, 1988. (24 min.)
Explores the art, culture, and beliefs of the Dogon people of Mali, based on Lester Wunderman's extensive collection of Dogon sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum; includes archival footage.

Ceramic Gestures: A Conversation with Magdalene Odundo. Directed by Victoria Vesna. University of California, Santa Barbara: Television Studios of Instructional Resources, 1995. (9 min.)
Produced in conjunction with the exhibition *Ceramic Gestures: New Vessels by Magdalene Odundo*.

Efe/Gelede Ceremonies among the Western Yoruba. Created by Henry John Drewal (June 1971).
©1997 Henry John Drewal.
Viewable on the Museum's website (www.metmuseum.org/explore/yoruba/htm/fs_4.htm), these two excerpts are from a film made in the town of Idahin and document the Metropolitan's Gelede mask (image 19) in two distinct creative contexts. One shows the sculptor Falola Edun completing work on the Gelede mask, while the other shows the mask being performed.

Yaaba Soore: The Path of the Ancestors. Produced by Rodney Jensen; written by Christopher Roy. Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1986. (17 min.)
Shows African masks from Burkina Faso in West Africa as they are used in ritual dances.

National Museum of African Art Teacher Resources at: www.nmafa.si.edu/exhibits/resources.html
Seven videos on African art, including *Ceramic Gestures: A Conversation with Magdalene Odundo*, *The Art of West African Strip-Woven Cloth*, *The Hands of the Potter*, *Masters of Brass: Lost-Wax Casting in Ghana*, and *Togu Na and Cheko: Change and Continuity in the Art of Mali*. Available on a free-loan basis.

Videos for Children

Anansi. Directed by C. W. Rogers. Illustrations by Steven Guarnaccia; story written by Brian Gleeson. We All Have Tales series; Children's Classics from Around the World series. Westport, Conn.: Rabbit Ears Productions, 1991. (30 min.)
These two hilarious stories introduce Anansi the spider, who wins possession of all the stories in the jungle by outsmarting the prideful snake.

Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears. Directed by Gene Deitch. From the book by Verna Aardema; illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon. Weston, Conn.: Weston Woods, 1984. (10 min.)
Animated West African tale that explains the mosquito's buzz.

Websites

Africa: One Continent, Many Worlds

www.nhm.org/africa

A collaboration between the Field Museum in Chicago, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, and others, this website focuses on the anthropology, geology, and natural history of Africa, but also includes an image database, organized by country.

American Museum of Natural History, New York

www.amnh.org/education

In the education section of its website, the American Museum of Natural History offers a search engine for its online resources, including curriculum materials, activities, and articles. The website also includes exhibition and collection information.

The Art Institute of Chicago

www.artic.edu

This site presents highlights from the Institute's collection of African art. Under the Art Access online resource, an Arts of Africa section includes lesson plans and online art activities.

DeYoung Museum, San Fransisco

www.deyoungmuseum.org

The "Collections" section of this website features 100 digital images of works in the African Art collection. An online "Teacher's Guide to African Art" is available.

EDSITEment

www.edsitement.neh.gov

This National Endowment for the Humanities website features a search engine that finds online teaching resources and lesson plans on a wide range of topics. Select the "History and Social Studies" tab, then select the subcategory "World History—Africa." The site also permits grade-specific searches, and the option to search for websites.

Fowler Museum, University of California, Los Angeles

www.fowler.ucla.edu

Although the Fowler's website does not present its outstanding collection—one of the premier collections of African art in the United States—its "Curriculum Resources for Teachers" page (under "Education") features its extensive list of African art publications and resources available for purchase.

National Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C.

www.nmafa.si.edu

The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art website features its vast collection, which is searchable online, information about exhibitions, web-based teacher resources, activities for children, and a link to *Radio Africa*. Videos on African art are available on a free-loan basis (see Videography, above).

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

www.metmuseum.org/explore

The Metropolitan Museum's "Explore and Learn" section includes an array of online activities, with African artists and art featured in "Artists" and "Themes and Cultures," respectively.

www.metmuseum.org/toah

The *Timeline of Art History* includes extensive information on African art and cultures, as well as on specific objects in the Museum's collection.

www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/collection.asp

Images and descriptions of selected African works in the Museum's collection are highlighted in the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas permanent collection section under "Works of Art."

Museum for African Art, Long Island City, Queens, New York

www.africanart.org

The website provides information about exhibitions, educational programs, and publications, as well as an online educational feature on African masks.

Saint Louis Art Museum

www.stlouis.art.museum

The website features "Art of Africa," an interactive online teacher's guide to the Museum's collection. It is also available as a PDF download.

University of Iowa, Iowa City

University of Iowa Museum of Art

www.uiowa.edu/uima

The website features a downloadable teacher's guide, *Discover Africa*, developed for seventh-grade social studies classes.

Art and Life in Africa Project

www.uiowa.edu/~africart/

Developed by the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Iowa, this website is adapted from a CD-ROM resource and has extensive links to articles, photographs, video, and music, featuring both traditional and contemporary African art. This resource is suitable for older students and teachers.

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In addition to the resources listed below, the author consulted the research files of the Museum's Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas.

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Anderson, Martha G., and Philip M. Peek, eds. *Ways of the Rivers: Arts and Environment of the Niger Delta*. Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2002.

Bassani, Ezio, and William B. Fagg. *Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory*. New York: Center for African Art, 1988.

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Blier, Suzanne Preston. "Imaging Otherness in Ivory: African Portrayals of the Portuguese, ca. 1492." *Art Bulletin* 75, no. 3 (September 1993), pp. 375–96.

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Cole, Herbert M., and Doran H. Ross. *The Arts of Ghana*. Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1977.

Colleyn, Jean-Paul, ed. *Bamana: The Art of Existence in Mali*. New York: Museum for African Art, 2001.

Courtney-Clarke, Margaret. *Ndebele: The Art of an African Tribe*. New York: Rizzoli, 1986.

Darish, Patricia. "Dressing for the Next Life: Raffia Textile Fabrication and Display among the Kuba of South Central Zaire." In *Cloth and Human Experience*, edited by Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider, pp. 117–40. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.

De Grunne, Bernard. "An Art Historical Approach to the Terracotta Figures of the Inland Niger Delta." *African Arts* 28, no. 4 (Autumn 1995), pp. 70–79, 112.

Drewal, Henry John, John Pemberton III, and Rowland Abiodun. *Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought*. New York: Center for African Art, 1989.

Drewal, Henry John, and Margaret Thompson Drewal. *Gelede: Art and Female Power among the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983.

Ezra, Kate. *A Human Ideal in African Art: Bamana Figurative Sculpture*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986.

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Fernandez, James W. "Principles of Opposition and Vitality in Fang Aesthetics." In *Art and Aesthetics in Primitive Societies: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Carol F. Jopling, pp. 356–73. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1971.

Garlake, Peter. *Early Art and Architecture of Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Glaze, Anita J. *Art and Death in a Senufo Village*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

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Jordán, Manuel, ed. *Chokwe! Art and Initiation among Chokwe and Related Peoples*. Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1998.

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