



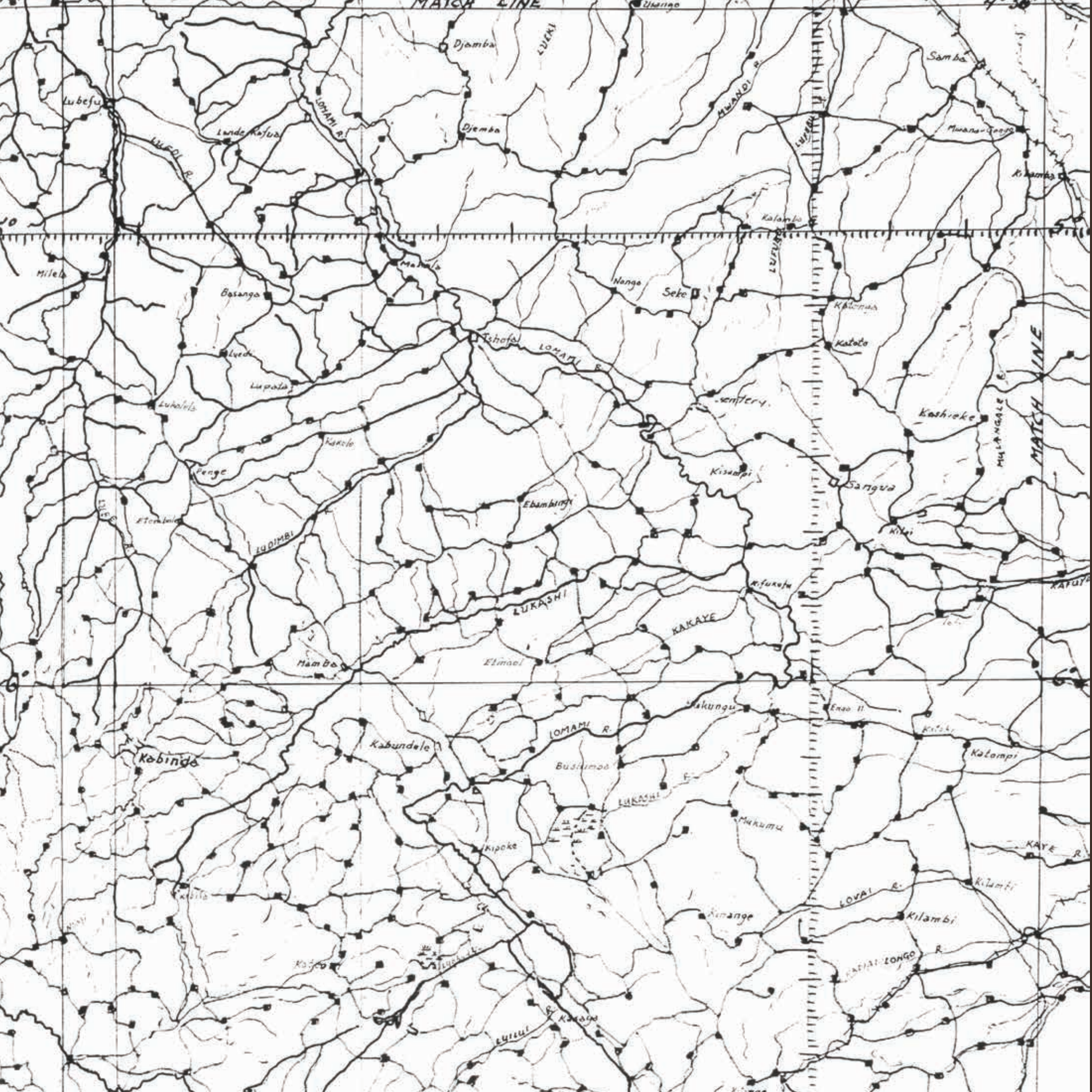
# Dimensions of Power

ELIZABETH GRON MORTON









A detail of one of many maps of Congo that Owen D. Mort Jr. meticulously drew for his unpublished handwritten manuscript, *The Art of Zaire: A Collectors Handbook*, 1993-94.



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*The* SNITE MUSEUM *of* ART



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## FOREWORD

This catalog is published in connection with the Museum's reinstallation of highlights of its African collection.

Reinstallation was undertaken because 1) more gallery space and greater interpretation were required as Notre Dame faculty, students, and local school children increasingly utilize the African collection, 2) in recent years Mr. Owen D. Mort Jr. gave the Museum a large collection of African art, examples of which needed to be integrated within the African gallery, and 3) the Museum staff wished to honor the artistic contributions of traditional African artists within a prestigious, main-floor gallery.

Visiting Curator of African Art Elizabeth Morton expertly and graciously oversaw all aspects of the project. The Museum staff invited Dr. Morton to lead the reinstallation after seeing evidence of her knowledge and skills within her reorganization of the African art collection at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. Here at the Snite Museum of Art, Dr. Morton examined thousands of African artworks within our collection, identifying specific artworks and themes for our exhibition. She then designed the exhibition in close collaboration with Notre Dame faculty; the Snite Museum of Art education curators; our digital and special projects, program manager; the Museum exhibition team; and external vendors, such as mount maker Aaron Leif Nicholson.

The result is the handsome, thoughtfully organized, and informative *Dimensions of Power* exhibition. Dr. Morton interpreted the exhibition through information that is shared on a touchscreen computer within the gallery and a Snite Museum app—both developed in collaboration with Snite Museum Digital and Special Projects, Program Manager Michael Rippy. This publication additionally illuminates the exhibition.

I am very grateful to Elizabeth for bringing distinction to our African art collection and for making it more relevant to campus and community audiences.

The project has special meaning for me because of long friendships with now deceased collector and benefactor Owen D. Mort Jr. and late Curator of the Arts of the Americas, Africa, and Oceania, Douglas Bradley. Dr. Morton honored these individuals by realizing their dreams for interpreting and celebrating African art and culture at the University of Notre Dame.

In addition to Dave Mort, I thank the other collectors who gave African artworks that are featured within this exhibition: David, Gayle, and Kenna Ackley; Mr. and Mrs. James W. Alsdorf; Mr. Ernest Anspach; Raymond E. Britt Jr. Family; Mr. and Mrs. David Christensen; Dr. and Mrs. James Christensen; Mr. Robert Driehaus; Charles S. Hayes Family; Mr. and Mrs. Richard and Susan Lee; Martin Foundation; Robert E. Navin; and Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. O'Grady '63.

The Lake Family Endowment for the Arts of the Americas, Africa, and Oceania provided essential support for costs associated with the reinstallation. This catalog was made possible by a gift from Ralph M. Hass.

Snite Museum of Art staff members who contributed to the success of this project include: Associate Director Ann M. Knoll; Curator of Education, Academic Programs Bridget O'Brien Hoyt; Curator of Education, Public Programs Sarah Martin; Digital and Special Projects, Program Manager Michael Rippy; Exhibition Coordinator Ramiro Rodriguez; Assistant Preparator Kyle Thorne; Staff Accountant Liz Zapf; Public Relations and Marketing Specialist Gina Costa; and Coordinator of Friends of the Snite Museum of Art, Mary Rattenbury.

The Africa Working Group of the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame has been vital for the educational vision of this exhibition. Among the faculty who have been generous with their time, expertise, and support are Dr. Paul Ocobock, Dr. Mariana Candido, Dr. Yacine Daddi Addoun, and Dr. Karen Graubart. The Physics Department at Notre Dame also provided a wonderful collaboration for Carbon-14 testing of a number of significant objects. Dr. Phillipe Collon, Dr. Michael Wiescher, and Ph.D. Candidates Adam Clark and Austin Nelson were central to this endeavor.

Denise Massa, Visual Resources Curator at Notre Dame, digitized hundreds of slides from the Owen D. Mort Jr. papers, while Professor Robin Baker in the Art Department graciously helped to create an animated film for the gallery experience. Notre Dame students Roseline Odhiambo and Ijeoma Ogbogu worked tirelessly to produce materials and social media for the new installation.

Other experts who provided expertise and advise for this exhibition and catalogue include Amanda Holden of the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Christopher Phillip and Nina Cummings from The Field Museum of Chicago, Dr. Delinda Collier of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Dr. Henry Drewal of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dr. Cécile Fromont of the University of Chicago, Dr. Gary van Wyck of Axis Gallery in New York, Dr. Barry C. Morton of the University of South Africa, and Dr. Sidney Littlefield Kasfir of Emory University.

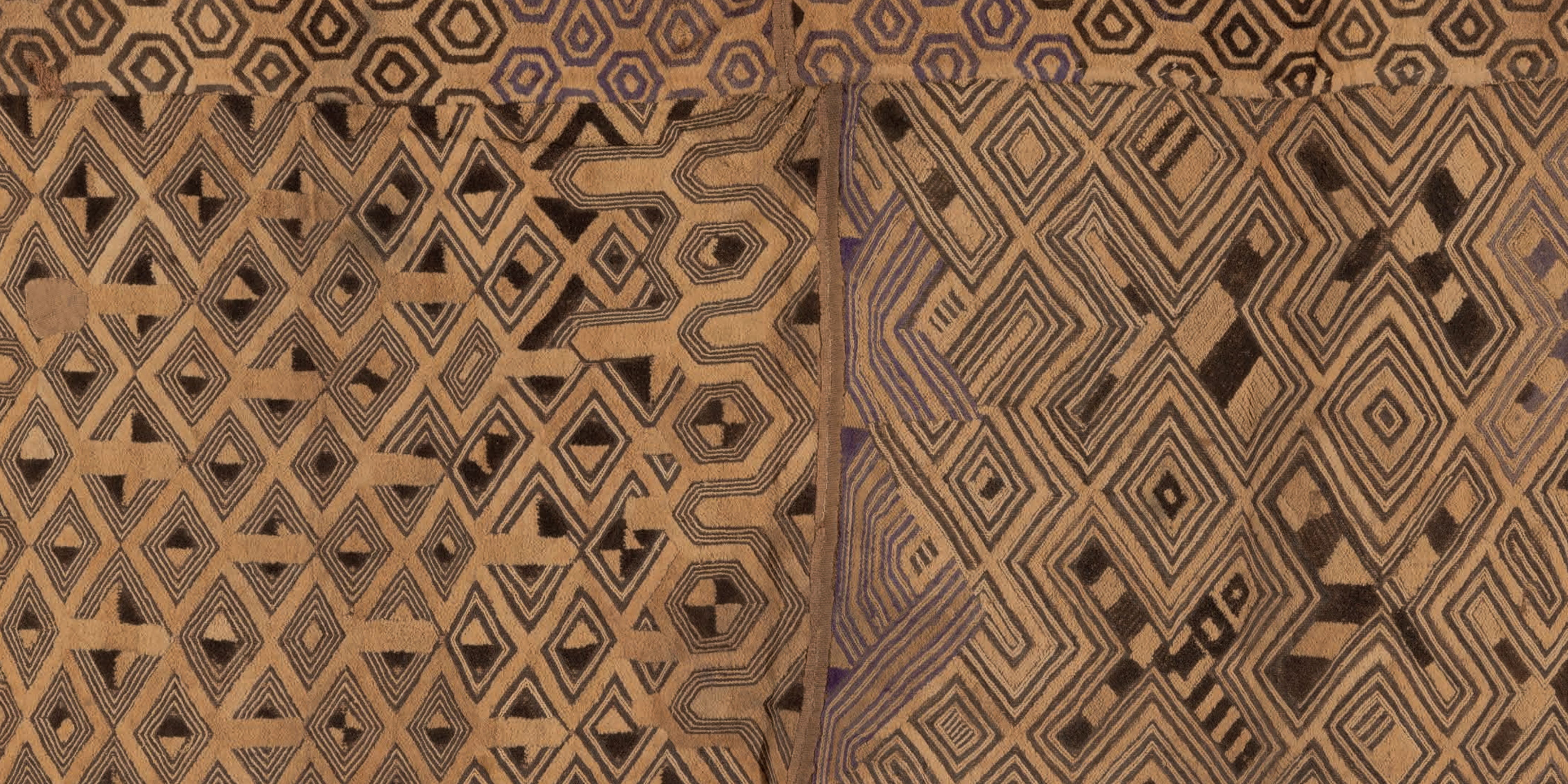
I am particularly proud of this exhibition and catalog because they so elegantly fulfill the mission and core values of the Snite Museum. All Museum artistic programs are founded on the principle that art is essential to understanding individual, shared, and diverse human experiences and beliefs. We encourage close looking and critical thinking to stimulate inquiry, dialogue, and wonder, and we value and celebrate diverse cultures, ideas, and audiences.

The exhibition and catalog also provide a welcome opportunity to celebrate the contributions of the regrettably unrecorded artists featured in the gallery.

— Charles R. Loving

*Director, Snite Museum of Art  
Curator, Charles B. Hayes Family Sculpture Park  
Curator, George Rickey Sculpture Archive*









## INTRODUCTION

*Dimensions of Power* is a major reinstallation of African art at the Snite Museum. After acquiring its first African objects in the early 1960s, long-time curator Douglas Bradley (1949-2013) oversaw the collection's growth through a steady stream of donations and purchases. In due course the Snite Museum acquired over a thousand African objects, and in the process developed the leading collection of Central African art in the United States.

**Marionette Puppet: French Colonial Officer on a Horse**  
Unrecorded Artist from Mali Bamana or Bozo style  
mid-twentieth century  
wood, fabric, paint, metal tacks, string  
Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
2017.025.667

Due to donations by such individuals as Owen D. Mort Jr. (see Chapter 1), the Snite Museum in particular has many quality pieces from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the huge Central African nation formerly known as Zaire.

The objects on display in the Africa gallery of the Snite Museum are visually striking, display exquisite craftsmanship, and often make use of an intriguing mixture of materials and textures. As such they can be, and usually are, viewed as aesthetic objects by modern museum patrons. Visitors to the Snite Museum, or any African art exhibition, should remember that “African traditional art” was almost always produced for a specific reason and purpose. Prior to the twentieth century, the concept of “art” was practically unknown in Africa, although craftsmen across the continent produced an astounding array of objects that might end up in a modern exhibition such as *Dimensions of Power*.

While many exhibitions of African art in the United States and Europe adopt a geographical convention, highlighting stylistic similarities of objects from the same regions, *Dimensions of Power* focuses on the specific utilitarian background of the items on display. Despite Africa's vast geographical distances, there were striking similarities in the way objects we now call “art” were used. Patrons, typically royals or those aspiring for “big man” status, sought to display their power to their subjects and neighbors. Families, clans, and individuals communicated with their ancestors or local spirits—who they believed had a major influence on events affecting the living. Communities and individuals endeavored to protect themselves from evil and witchcraft, since they didn't believe in concepts such as luck and chance. During rituals and rites of passage, they wore special objects and adornments specifically produced for the occasion. Much of what we now call traditional art in Africa was thus used for a very concrete effect. Even a large proportion of what appears to be purely decorative art had similar functionality. Hence, *Dimensions of Power* organizes the Snite Museum's collection into the major categories for which the objects were produced. Chapter 2 highlights these categories of economic, political, social, and spiritual power in the exhibition.





# 1

OWEN D. MORT JR.  
A PORTRAIT OF AN AFRICAN ART COLLECTOR

Although institutions such as the Snite Museum acquire African art at auctions or directly from dealers, they acquire most of their holdings from a few major collectors. These collectors, in turn, have two primary ways of obtaining their artworks. One group tends to purchase them (usually from galleries or itinerant dealers) for decorative use in their homes. Usually a wealthy or establishment figure residing in a major city, these collectors are interested in African art from a purely aesthetic perspective, and have little knowledge of Africa beyond what they encounter on an occasional safari visit. A good example of this type of collector is the Indianapolis mining magnate Harrison Eiteljorg, who bequeathed the Indianapolis Museum of Art his entire collection of several thousand works in the 1980s.

Perhaps more intriguing are the second major group of collectors of African art—the individuals who resided in Africa for an extended period of time. This motley group of missionaries, diplomats, academics, pilots, entrepreneurs, and adventurers, though always far less wealthy than its America-based counterparts, nevertheless can leverage its local-level acumen and contacts to acquire holdings that rival their well-heeled adversaries. A major difference in the types of collections that the two groups develop is that the America-based city collector tends to have an eclectic, continent-wide array of objects, whereas the African resident collector tends to focus solely on the region where they once lived.

Owen D. Mort Jr. is a classic example of this second type of collector, who obtained a large coterie of works originating from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), formerly known as Zaire. Much of this material he purchased while working in Zaire as a USAID employee from 1974 to 1982. Mort's occupation suited his choice of leisure activity, because his job was based in the capital, Kinshasa, where the local dealers and connoisseurs were located. But his job also involved traveling across the country to supervise dam construction and other infrastructure projects, and hence he was able to seek out local craftsmen and styles in a variety of locations without having to resort to middlemen.

Once he returned to America, Mort continued to devote himself to his collection and continued to make purchases from itinerant African dealers and other collectors. In doing so he obtained ephemera such as weapons, beads, agricultural implements, and old currency, but he also bought many other more typical fine art pieces such as masks, carvings, and power figures, whose value he was aware of due to his prior expertise. In the 1990s, Mort began donating his collection to museums, in hopes that it would become a fundamental resource for the general public to learn about and appreciate Africa. While working on the Glen Canyon Dam project, Mort had an office in Salt Lake City, which motivated him to gift over 1000 works to the Utah Museum of Fine Arts. Here, Mort met Charles R. Loving, who would later become the Director of the Snite Museum of Art. Through this connection, Mort donated another group of over 1000 objects to the Snite Museum, where it now forms more than half of the museum's fine collection of African art.



COLLECTING ART IN ZAIRE:  
A CAT AND MOUSE GAME



Map drawn by Owen D. Mort Jr. for  
*The Art of Zaire: A Collectors Handbook*.  
Unpublished manuscript, 1993-94.

Mort arrived in Zaire at a time when art had a prominent role in the public sphere there. The legendary American-backed dictator and kleptocrat Mobutu Sese Seko (1965-1997) was in complete control of his sprawling nation, basking in the glow of the recent Ali-Foreman “Rumble in Jungle” heavyweight championship fight. His cultural program of “authenticité” was in full swing, with the Zairois forced to abandon their western dress and names in favor of local garb and nomenclature. Mobutu had established the Zairean National Museum (IMNZ) and had succeeded in getting the colonial Belgian museums to return thousands of artworks. Meanwhile, he provided funds for staff at the IMNZ to scour the country for objects. By the time of Mort’s arrival in Kinshasa the IMNZ had one of the major African art collections in the world, as well as a motivated and knowledgeable staff that was busy cataloguing and categorizing their massive and impressive holdings. The IMNZ’s holdings were not only held to be a repository of Zaire’s authentic culture, but also to serve as inspiration for modern national artists, intellectuals, and citizens. So while art was very prominent in Kinshasa, by the time of Mort’s arrival the National Museum had exhausted its purchasing budget. Dealers thus had to cultivate new expatriate buyers, such as Mort. As he relates in his notebooks, the art was brought to those known to be willing to buy on a regular basis and “many fine authentic pieces were finding their way onto the market...For collectors, the period between 1974 and 1979 was a time when authentic Zaire Art was available, since these were years of extreme financial difficulty.” Villages and groups sold off their valuables, while in other cases desperate individuals stole them in the countryside and brought them to Kinshasa for sale to foreigners.

Although Mort knew nothing of traditional Zairean art on arrival, he quickly took an interest in it. At the outset he lacked expertise, and was “not an astute or knowledgeable collector.” As his predilection for this newfound hobby grew, he met bimonthly with other expatriate collectors and connoisseurs at hotels and residences in Kinshasa. These meetings, primarily involving Americans and Belgians, attracted at times as many as twenty attendees who would all bring “several pieces to show and discuss.” As could be expected, all these collectors had different tastes and opinions, but all seem to have been equally enthusiastic. They brought new and proposed

purchases to their meetings and other get-togethers, and debated their origins, values, beauty, and authenticity. Usually the collectors would also invite an expert “to look at and comment on the pieces.”

Through this initiation into the art world, Mort developed various contacts with professionals who could both supply him with works and develop his own taste and expertise. Some experts whom Mort invited to the meetings were actually dealers, such as Patric Claes. Born and raised in Zaire, Claes was the preeminent Zaire-based art dealer for decades. Fluent in many languages and married to a Zairean, he spent the majority of his time in the forests and savannas buying pieces. Claes was able to visit most parts of Zaire, and knew where objects were made and could be purchased. As a result of this expertise, he was the major seller of pieces to the IMNZ in the 1960s. The government recognized his knowledge by making him the only expert authorized to testify in court in matters relating to Zairean art. Whether directly or indirectly, then, Mort’s collecting group depended heavily on Patric Claes’s work and opinions.

The problem for the Kinshasa collectors was that they were locked into a continual cat and mouse game with Claes and lesser dealers who also ventured into the bush to obtain traditional art. Whereas President Mobutu focused on the “authenticité” of his subjects’ behavior, the collectors were obsessed by the “authenticity” of the artwork they sought to purchase. Everyone wished to buy “authentic,” older pieces, that had been used in ceremonies or ritual activities by Zaireans. Hence items produced by craftsmen for use by their countrymen prior to the arrival of the European collector were in heavy demand, but few of these items were on the market. Mort noted: “the art of yesterday is really rare enough to be not overly concerned with. It would be foolish to think that much of the old art still exists.”

Mort and other collectors also knew that Claes was a businessman, so did not believe everything he said. “The dealer will try to tell you that their particular piece is a masterpiece, or an outstanding piece of its type, or a magnificent work of art, or it is unique, or many other things, and for them there may be a grain of truth in most of what they say, but remember, these people are dealers of art first, and last!” When Claes found a truly rare and exquisite item, he would seek to place it in an international exhibition at a prestigious American or European museum. Following this exposure, its



value would rapidly increase once it was viewed as a masterpiece, and thus would end up falling into the hands of a high end gallery that would pay top dollar. Hence, the finest works were completely off-limits to the Kinshasa collectors, and they had to be savvy in sifting through what else was on offer.

So while local dealers sent the best pieces overseas, they typically tried to pawn off older, damaged pieces to local buyers by having them repaired before offering them to collectors: “One of the more aggravating experiences in dealing with African Art, is to find good authentic and oftentimes very old pieces, that have been reworked and gooped up in an attempt to make the pieces more saleable or valuable...this type of doctoring up of pieces is very common.” After having been taken a few times, Mort came to the inevitable conclusion: “Most dealers are in the business for the money. ‘Conscience’ is not really one of the requirements to become a dealer.”

As a result of this lack of trust of Claes and others, Mort spent considerable time visiting the National Museum and touring the collection with its curators in order to seek out unbiased opinions. Only by seeing numerous other works and obtaining objective opinions could he and his fellow collectors avoid getting deceived. As a result, Mort and others in his collecting circle came to rely heavily on Charles Henault, probably the most colourful of all the Zairean art experts and collectors. A Belgian bebop jazz drummer by profession, Henault had moved to Kinshasa during the 1950s and then remained in the country during the turbulent transition to independence in the early 1960s. Soon, Henault became a fixture in the country’s vibrant dance hall scene that was at the forefront of African popular music. Then in 1970, the head of the IMNZ, Fr. Pierre Cornet, tapped Henault to be one of three “Chargés de missions” to acquire traditional art across the vastness of Zaire. In an epic four years of traveling, Henault and his assistants purchased and photographed over 1500 objects from the forests and riverine areas of the country that became part of the IMNZ permanent collection. As a result of his experiences, Henault was in constant contact with dealers and had an extensive knowledge of Zairean traditional art. This knowledge combined with a lack of personal conflicts meant that Mort eventually viewed Henault as his most reliable authority on Zairean art and culture. He often made extensive notes of Henault’s opinions, and would later correspond regularly with him once he returned to the United States.

But no matter how many opinions Mort and his group obtained, they often had a very difficult time ascertaining whether artworks were “authentic” or not: “the first thing that becomes certain is the uncertainty of the various opinions. I have in my collection, numerous pieces that have been pronounced both authentic and fake from these ‘experts.’ Each with certainty and in absolute honesty of opinion.”

Having met Charles Henault in the quest for perfect judgment, Mort inevitably met Fr. Pierre Cornet, the Belgian priest that Mobutu had installed to head the IMNZ. Although less accessible to collectors than Henault, Cornet’s academic writing such as *Art de L’Afrique Noire* was central in establishing the criteria by which Mort viewed and assessed Zairean pieces. Cornet, using the many resources at his disposal, focused on the classification of Zairean art by region and ethnicity. Like other eminent African art historians of his era, he sought to define the style of ethnic groups living in a geographic region, with major styles then encompassing the variations of the ethnic groups in the area. This preoccupation with classification, which at its worst was more reminiscent of biology than art history, relied heavily on anthropology. The underlying assumption was that African tribes existed in a certain way prior to the arrival of Europeans and colonialism, and that art produced by those societies reflected this “pre-contact” culture. Thus, by locating and classifying the art object and identifying its cultural use, the art historian could find meaning and significance in it.

Although Mort was not close to Cornet, he gained an appreciation for the latter’s Zairean classifications and on an overall basis sought to locate his own objects within their framework: “I agree that there are certain definite tribal characteristics in African sculpture, that generally allow a tribal attribution of the piece to be made.” However, he noted that processes such as copying, conquest, enslavement, migration, religion, and innovation were continually changing any region’s art, making ethnic classification somewhat arbitrary: “general ethnic ancestry seems to play little part in the art styles.... tribally developed styles [are typically] based on the influences of small isolated tribal groups.” For Mort, then, traditional art was very dynamic, an outlook not necessarily shared by many of his contemporaries. “Many authors have commented on the fact that the old art is gone and have said that no authentic art has been made for many years. This is of course partly right and mostly wrong.”

For Mort and other collectors, a way to overcome potential manipulation was to venture into the interior oneself and to buy directly from local craftsmen and people. Unfortunately, with Zaire’s environment and infrastructure being as challenging as they were to navigate, this could not be done on a regular basis. Mort’s job working on dams, though, allowed him to venture up the Upper and Lower Congo River, where he was able to seek out pieces during his down time. This approach necessitated more research, since he needed to understand regional styles in order to have a keener eye for what he was obtaining. Hence Mort always traveled with Fr. Cornet’s book in his backpack.

Mort and his friends also began to bypass Claes by seeking out lesser-known African dealers in Kinshasa. “All of these men have traveled in the bush for many thousands of miles, and spent time in the villages bargaining for the art. They have visited the workshops of the artisan, artists, and carvers that produce the authentic as well as the copies and fakes.”

Mort’s obsession with avoiding fakes led him into another surprising avenue—seeking out workshops in Kinshasa where craftsmen made replicas of traditional art. Typically these individuals had begun their careers in the bush carving for their people’s own needs, although producing pieces to sell to urban dealers. Many of these traditional carvers, sensing new possibilities, ended up moving to the city in order to produce solely for collectors. Once in the city, they often abandoned their traditional tools, and instead purchased modern equipment, such as lathes, saws, sanders, and other hardware, and proved capable of mass producing any design that was in vogue. For collectors such as Mort, the goal was to avoid being sold one of these pieces, so he made a point of visiting these urban carvers, talking to them, and seeing what they were doing.

Mort and his fellow collectors, as they became more sophisticated, developed a range of insights and tell-tale signs to assist them in their quest for authentic pieces. The group met in brightly lit settings and brought magnifying glasses to closely examine surfaces. The appearance of kaolin in black paints on the surface of objects was believed to be a dead giveaway of fakes. They rejected anything carved using ebony. Large masks were expected to be sweat-stained and made from lighter woods. They examined the base of carvings to see if they had been sawed off (another giveaway), rather than

chopped off with an axe in the traditional manner. Many of Mort’s fellow collectors summarily rejected buying any sculpture showing signs of a sawed-off based, eventually leading the artisans to respond by always using an axe on the base. Additionally, many collectors, when examining masks, looked under the raffia near the holes and rejected the mask as fake if the patina was not uniform—believing that, “traditionally,” artisans always applied a uniform patina prior to adding the raffia and other adornments to the mask. Of course, before long, all the fakes showed a uniform patina. Smelling (adopted from art historians) was another technique the collectors used. “Authentic” raffia coverings were expected to have a smoky smell, because they were supposed to have been stored in huts used by their owners and had been exposed to fires used in cooking. Collectors hence rejected raffia that smelled differently as fake.

Of course, given the game that collectors were playing, none of their “tells” worked consistently over time, because they had to examine pieces in the presence of dealers. African dealers, who “really didn’t understand what it was that the collectors were smelling for,” could be kept in the dark for a while due to language barriers, although Claes could not. Soon, though, even African dealers figured out what the collectors were trying to spot and began to provide a “darker brownish smoked color and a definite smoke odor on the raffia and hood—then he suspends it above a small fire of oily wood for a couple of days and again we have instant age, patina, and odor, and everything is fine.” Aged, smoky, raffia was harder to achieve, though, since the fakers’ attempts usually made raffia brittle, and the collectors continued to emphasize raffia as a sure basis of authenticity. The collectors also paid close attention to the holes on masks where the raffia was removed, looking for “authentic” signs of wear. “A study of the mask will sometimes show that the string should pull in a definite direction, and if the masks don’t go that way then something is wrong.” While the fakers were initially naïve, assigning the task of creating wear to clueless apprentices, the master craftsmen soon began using “a small round file” to create the appropriate type of wear. Hence another “tell” evaporated! Another thing that the collectors looked for was overall wear on objects, with the collectors seeking signs of wear from older, “authentic” pieces. Masks and carvings with shiny patina, therefore, were deemed somewhat suspect. Collectors looked to see



if holes and other indentations had shiny patinas, and if so, always rejected them as fakes. Once again, the fakers learned to produce a more aged feel using various rubbing techniques, and learned to keep patina out of all holes. The list could go on: the collectors examined the interior surfaces of masks, rejecting those that were rough as fakes, since their wearers' faces would have been cut up; when they viewed termite damage as evidence of authenticity, the carvers would insert their new productions into termite mounds prior to sale, etc, etc. The cat and mouse game never ceased. In the meantime, producers of fakes told the collectors, "they do not make fakes, they make copies!"

Collectors learned to quickly gravitate away from art ostensibly produced in certain regions, knowing that it actually was being produced in Kinshasa. They would instead, gravitate to collecting pieces from areas that had no known fakes. They would consult curators at the IMNZ and examine and photograph obscure works kept in storerooms. When one or two of the collectors succeeded in making a purchase from this uncorrupted field, their advantage rarely lasted long. Word would soon get out, and within months a whole host of new carvings, remarkably similar to those recently purchased by the connoisseurs, would make their appearance on the market.

For Mort and his fellow connoisseurs in Kinshasa, collecting was thus a highly-involved and interesting affair. Could a mask with a shiny patina actually be an old, well-looked after piece that only had occasional but important uses? Perhaps. And since everybody else might routinely reject it as fake, it might even be possible to purchase it cheaply. Or, if you went to see lesser dealers who were somewhat less attuned to values on the international market, maybe you could pick up an older piece at a fairly reasonable price.

That Mort enjoyed playing these games and collecting Zairean art, as well as associating with fellow devotees, would be an understatement. "The collecting of African Art over the past years has been a source of joy!" It was probably his life's greatest pleasure: "it has been both my privilege and pleasure to spend many evenings and sometimes days, with the various experts in the Art of Zaire, looking at and discussing the 'object d'art' of the moment."

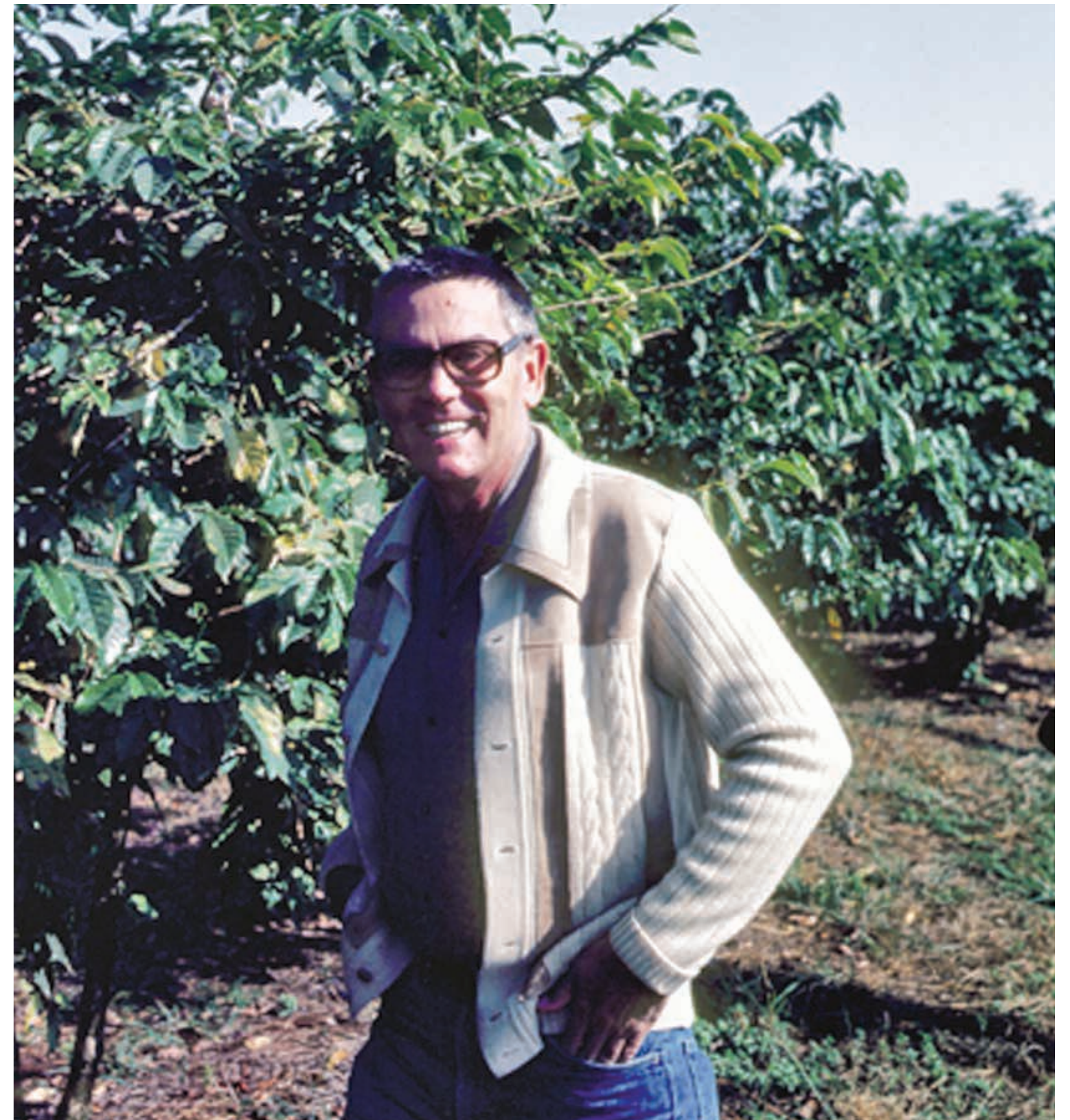
Surprisingly, over time Mort came to have an extremely deep appreciation of the talent of the craftsmen producing fakes and copies for the market—although he could never quite bring himself to reject the authentic vs. inauthentic binary mind set he had started with.

"The talented carver was a master technician. He had a strong feeling for the wood itself, its grain, its structural patterns. The very problems inherent in wood carving in some degree influenced, limited, or controlled the result. Often, this was a challenge to the carver's ingenuity and skill, at the same time imposing on him a discipline. This contributed to the coherence of his work.... Respect for the rhythm of the wood was often the reason for the natural flow of the shapes of his masks, but the carver never took advantage of the particularity of the grain to create superficial effects."

These craftsmen producing copies and fakes, he found, were either the same ones producing "authentic" works, or were just as talented. Commercially-produced carvings were exquisitely done, and were worth purchasing since "all were obviously made by the same master craftsman," and "identical in form, style, and carving." These works were "almost all surely copies or outright fakes. However, beautiful fakes!" Mort fervently believed in this contemporary production. "Time will tell whether these [fakes and newer carvings] are regarded as ethnic art or not. In my opinion, these pieces, in fifty years will be considered to be in the same category as the "authentic" pieces are today."

So Mort eventually collected in two different ways. There were his "authentic" purchases made with the group. The other way he bought, he maintained, was for "art," i.e. he knowingly purchased fakes that he believed to be brilliantly executed. One Pende carver he knew named Malela carved for both his own people and for tourists, and Mort was happy to buy from him directly even if the object was never used in any ceremony. Mort thus left the Congo in 1982 and shipped his large collection back to America.

Owen D. Mort Jr. on a collecting trip in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 1970s  
Owen D. Mort Jr. Papers







## THE SECOND PERIOD OF COLLECTING: RETIREMENT



Following his retirement in the early 1990s, Mort moved to California and began to slowly reprise his active interest in his collection. Over time he became more and more involved in it, with his interest consuming his later years.

Early on in his retirement, Mort started to purchase cheaper items from the itinerant African dealers who were seeking out buyers across America. Because these dealers had such antique items as weapons, currency, and beads that were not in high demand by museums and fine art collectors, Mort obtained a wide range of objects from these categories from ethnic groups all over Zaire. He also began to correspond again with his old collecting colleagues from Kinshasa, and sent photos of objects he had purchased to Charles Henault in Kinshasa and later Belgium for comment. During this time Mort toyed with the idea of producing a book about Zairean art. He consolidated his materials, and began reading academic treatises on the subject again.

In 1998, Mort received a letter from Henault that sparked a new phase in Mort's collecting career. By this time, the IMNZ, like Zaire itself, was in shambles. During the previous years, Mobutu had been increasingly ill with cancer and was rapidly losing control over his fiefdom. Desperate for funds to support his convalescence in Switzerland, he had sent henchmen to the IMNZ—who then filled a jet airliner with hundreds of the most valuable pieces and took them for sale in Europe. Soon this art began to appear on the open market. The result was that “authentic” Zairean art became available again for the first time since the late 1970s. Both Henault and Cornet left the IMNZ, establishing themselves as Claes-like dealers. They were now in the strange position of bidding and acquiring objects at auction that had previously been under their care! Before long both obtained stolen IMNZ works, as did Mort and several members of his old collecting circle.

When the Uganda and Rwanda-backed rebel, Laurent Kabila overthrew Mobutu's regime in 1997, there was still some hope that the IMNZ could survive and that the art market in the newly-renamed Democratic Republic of Congo would return to its former state. Henault, though now a dealer, was still connected to the IMNZ and hoped for its resuscitation. His frantic letter to Mort in 1998, though, showed that the IMNZ was doomed as it now fell under the control of a regime-linked mafia. In his broken Frenglish,

Henault explained: “Before I think that the government did not pay [the museum staff], but now I think is [government] with the *renseignements sur les good pieces, and militaires.*” Cornet and Henault wished to write a book about the IMNZ and its collections, “but the gang make menaces to us. We stop to do the book. We don't want to die for the IMNZ collection.... Militaire and another people go in museum et menace les Sergeants si ils font opposition peut être 200 ou plus sont volées a l'IMNZ, is a gang organisé.”

Although the implosion of one of Africa's great museums was a tragedy, Henault did not doubt the morality or efficacy of collectors obtaining works that had been looted from it: “You are not the first ami qui a acheté un ou des objets—all IMNZ. Don't care. If the country stop war and make reorganization you can give back. [Another acquaintance] has a little beautiful Songye from IMNZ too and many friends too. In my hand I have a cup Lele to drink palm wine [from the IMNZ].”

Henault's letter essentially changed the course of Mort's last two decades. Whereas he initially had modest ambitions for his writing about Congolese art, the situation had now changed completely. Not only had the IMNZ been looted, but Cornet and Henault's envisaged masterpiece was now permanently sidelined. To salvage the situation and to preserve the legacy of Zairean art that had been severely undermined by the collapse of the IMNZ, Mort set about composing his three volume work, *Art of Zaire*, which aimed to be a heavily-illustrated, encyclopedic account of the topic. He also began collecting fine, authentic pieces again.

Mort's writing ended up being heavily dependent on Charles Henault. The latter had been able to extricate himself, his family, and his sizeable art collection from increasingly anarchic Congo after Mort and others in his collecting group gave him small amounts of money to re-establish himself in Belgium. Henault remained highly grateful for this assistance, and was always willing to meet or correspond with his benefactors, or to otherwise volunteer his expertise when asked. He searched for and located items they were interested in, alerting them to what was available on the market rather than trying to sell them works directly. Mort met Henault several times at events in the United States, and the latter commented on all the Congolese pieces that Mort and his

colleagues purchased in the United States, and sent back his opinions regarding their provenance and authenticity. Henault's own collection, those of his contacts, combined with his extensive set of the IMNZ's old records, were invaluable to Mort in his attempts to cover art from all over the Congo.

Mort eventually completed the manuscript of his *chef d'oeuvre*, *Art of Zaire*, privately publishing copies for some of his fellow connoisseurs. In order to complete the work, Mort read widely and attended a number of major exhibitions across the United States. He also made extensive use of copies of IMNZ photographs and records that Henault had salvaged or copied. Specialists of Congolese traditional art will undoubtedly prize his exhaustive efforts, although the manuscript is inconsistent in a number of ways. Primarily he overemphasizes the objects that he had collected and purchased himself. He illustrated each item by hand in great detail, with various profiles and patterns often receiving extra attention. He meticulously provided each item's known provenance with information about the artist, village of origin, etc. Hence much of Mort's writing is episodic, and focuses on the various kinds of art that he came across in the 1970s. This focus makes it hard for him to establish wider themes or generate an original interpretation of the field.

Two recurring analytical themes in Mort's writing regularly transcend the object. Not surprisingly, given his collecting experiences, one primary issue was the “authenticity” of the object. Mort's notes show that he had read many of the major African art historians and seminal articles on this issue, and that he had thought closely about it for many, many years. Mort accepted that Africans produced an “authentic” piece of traditional art for use in their own ceremonies and daily practices. He was far less comfortable delineating Christian or Western-influenced art objects as inauthentic, as was typical in the 1970s, and was personally willing to buy such pieces. The biggest source of inauthentic works, though, for him, were not these mission or school art pieces, but “fakes” and “copies” that African artisans produced to make money. These copies almost always sought to recreate “authentic” works for tourists or Western purchasers who had no interest or ability to use them for their original ceremonial purposes.



Mort, his fellow collectors, the African art history world, as well as the Zairean dealers and the National Museum, all fervently accepted this conceptual framework of authenticity. But despite their unanimity, experts tended to have very different opinions about individual artworks. As Mort noted, “I have listened to arguments over minute detail that neither clarified nor resolved the difference of opinion, and the piece remained both good and bad at the end of the discussion. With this type of controversy, it becomes evident that the opinion of the experts, is just that! An ‘opinion’ only and it is open to error in judgment, ignorance of stylistic variations, or sometimes change or even totally unknown styles or types of art or objects. So, it would behove anyone with any expertise what-so-ever, be extremely careful of pronouncing different objects either authentic or fake.”

Focusing on authenticity, Mort maintained, was also illusory since it neglected the vital category of artistic merit: “To admire a piece of art, simply because it is in a ‘primitive’ form, is incomprehensible to me.” Mort had come to prize many commercially-generated pieces in his collection more than his authentic ones, and believed that over time these works would come to be accepted as “authentic.” Yet, despite his obvious misgivings about the subject, he was never really willing to throw out the old orthodoxy.

A second major emphasis in Mort’s writing is his close following of Cornet’s work on Congolese art, using the same framework to organize his vast materials. Like Cornet, Mort divided up the Congo into geographic regions, then sub-divided these by ethnic group. He then laid out artworks commonly produced by each ethnic group, making photographs and illustrations of their typical styles and motifs. Underlying the organization was the assumption, commonly held until postmodernism arrived, that each ethnic group had its own distinct style and practices that mirrored the local culture. This way of looking at African traditional art provided little room for maverick creators, innovators, and change. Rather, it privileged a static past where certain peoples operated in a certain way.

One of the biggest problems Mort encountered in his reliance on Cornet’s classification system was that he uncovered many artworks that did not conform to any known style. These unrecognized or idiosyncratic pieces had all too typically been dismissed as fakes in Kinshasa, which Mort viewed as “unfortunate, because these pieces are no less authentic African Art than the finest Chokwe figure that was ever carved.” In general, Mort attributed most objects to certain tribal groups in the manner Cornet suggested. But in many instances it was impossible because many areas, sometimes not even contiguous, had interchangeable styles. In other cases, Mort found, brand new styles of art developed within certain kingdoms and ethnic groups as they grew or encountered outsiders. Many of these new practices, which were still “authentic,” had developed comparatively recently. Hence, not all authentic art was necessarily old or predated the influence of the West.

This appreciation of the dynamism of traditional art made Mort open in his recognition of the innovation and adaptation of current artisans and craftsmen, and to appreciate the value of their work even if it was not designed for “authentic” purposes. For instance, in 1976 while in southern Zaire, he met a coppersmith who was still fashioning copper crosses, which had functioned as currency in the area for centuries. Mort’s discussions with the individual showed that the smith had learned smelting from his father, a former worker in the massive Gecamines smelting complex, and that the two had designed their own village smelter using such materials as the tips of termite mounds and goat skins to build their furnace and bellows. Hence, the two were producing traditional items using borrowed knowledge and utterly innovative techniques. Mort also believed that many ethnic groups were still using a variety of objects ritually in the 1970s, and that craftsmen were still producing for this market. These were the items that he preferred to seek out: “today’s carvings being made to satisfy the demands of the various ethnic groups, which are indeed the ‘authentic’ African art of today, and these items are just as much ‘authentic’ as any piece ever made in Africa.”

Prior to his death in 2012, Mort donated his writings and collection to the Snite Museum, where they have strengthened an already extensive Central African collection.

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Owen D. Mort Jr. Papers

1. Ephemera—various academic offprints, museum and exhibition brochures.
2. Handwritten, unnumbered, undated, and unordered set of notes for book to be called “Art of Zaire: A Collector’s Handbook.”
3. *The Art of Zaire: A Collectors Handbook*. Three-volume, unpublished manuscript, 1993-94.
4. Binder featuring Zairean ethnographic and art photographs and correspondence with Charles Henault, 1997-2002.



# 2

## DIMENSIONS OF POWER



*Gold is more powerful than the sword.*

– an Akan proverb from Ghana

## ECONOMIC POWER



In the economically competitive free-trading coastal regions of West and Central Africa, objects signifying the economic power of the owner were particularly common. A major reason for this strong desire for public distinction was that commercial trading organizations in many areas were not based on kinship and blood relations. As a result, ambitious men vied for wealth and public renown, with art being one of their means of display.

During the era of the transatlantic slave trade (c. 1500–1830s), meanwhile, African rulers' success usually depended on their ability to tax or control various forms of commerce that accompanied the arrival of European ships at their ports. In exchange for their slaves, gold, and ivory, African rulers typically commanded monopolies on other luxury goods that they received. The ways in which they distributed and made use of these trade goods was central to their power and resulted in the formation of vast empires throughout the continent. When European powers colonized nearly all of Africa during the late nineteenth century, they in turn were motivated by a desire to make profits from the continent's riches. Many of the finest works of African art reflect the control of these shifting networks of trade, along with their use for the promotion of personal status.



## ASAFO MILITARY SOCIETY FLAG

During the era of the transatlantic trade, the coastal zone of what was then known as the Gold Coast in modern day Ghana was not under the control of any single political organization. Although loosely grouped into the “Fante Confederacy,” the city-states along the coast were independent entities. These Fante city-states all prospered from their geographic position, which allowed them to act as middlemen between the European shipping companies that docked their vessels and the large inland nation-states to the north. In Fante cities such as Elmina, power was also widely dispersed, and chiefs and other politicians usually only controlled a section or ward of the town.

Asafo military societies, from the early 1700s on, arose to answer the military needs arising from this fractured political system. All hundred or so of the Fante towns required the necessary authority in order to police the ports, to collect taxes, and to ensure that neither European naval power nor more powerful adversaries from the north would be tempted to take over the lucrative coastal trade. Probably modeled on the troops occupying European forts nearby, the Asafo companies only controlled one ward or section of their town, and were responsible for defending and regulating it.

Typically consisting of all able-bodied young men in a ward, the Asafo were hierarchically organized and followed a rigorous set of laws and bylaws. Each had its own headquarters, elected leadership, and regalia. Additionally, each Asafo unit had its own unique magico-religious belief system and priests, which were used in various ways to avert misfortune. All the various Asafo companies in a city were ranked, and over time certain ceremonial duties were apportioned to each unit. Because running a military company was expensive, each one tended to appoint wealthier members as their leader. Each Asafo leader, once elected, then produced his own flag to be used during his tenure. These flags were considered important political statements and had the ability to antagonize rival companies, and therefore could not be displayed before being approved by local political authorities.

The Snite Museum flag once belonged to Asafo Company No. 1 of an unidentified Fante town, led by one Abram Bohlen (Boahen). His company, if typical, would have owned numerous such

flags for use in parades or for display at the company headquarters or shrine. It would be tempting to imagine that being the leader of Company No. 1 in his town made him the senior-ranking commander there. However, it was quite common for Asafo to list themselves in reverse order of seniority, so he might actually have been the most junior of the Asafo commanders! Although this particular leader’s exploits and personal history have not survived, his flag does provide some clues as to where and when he lived.

Because the Union Jack is located in the top left corner, it is reasonable to assume that the flag was made during British colonial rule, which began in 1874 and lasted until 1954. During this era British officials had to vet all new Asafo flags, with many therefore incorporating the Union Jack to acknowledge the colonial power’s ultimate authority. The use of borders is a stylistic choice that became common around the turn of the twentieth century, so the flag is probably not more than 100 years old. It is also worth noting that the Boahen clan is not a coastal clan but originates quite far inland, so Abram Boahen was someone whose family had probably migrated to the coast and thus may have lacked any blood ties to the ruling families in his area. In short, he came from the mass of the commoners who made up the bulk of the Asafo, which in turn coexisted with the senior-born members of the Fante clans, which often exercised political control in most areas.

In the center of the flag near a set of scales, a man who we may safely assume to be Abram Boahen himself, is holding a big *futuo*, or a bag used to collect and carry gold dust. The implication is that Boahen is wealthy and powerful. Given that images on Asafo flags often illustrated well-known local proverbs, the picture of Boahen would seem to correspond with the local saying that “ostentation comes from a full *futuo*,” or that “gold is sharper than the sword.” Meanwhile, an elephant—a symbol for power in Ghana and most of Africa—holds and extends the scales toward Boahen. Essentially, the image would appear to show that the low-born Boahen is now so rich and powerful that even the higher-ranked and more eminent local authorities now deal with him and accept his stature. Thus while the image is boastful, it also alludes to the fractured and shifting nature of power on the coast, where high achievers vied for influence and status with men from elite, senior-ranking families.



The right side of the flag features a three-headed dragon, an animal obviously borrowed from European heraldry. The dragon was fast, powerful, and deadly, and could go anywhere it wanted, and alluded to the power of the company to find you wherever you were. Dragons featured frequently in flags up and down the coast, and featured in many companies’ regalia and shrine sculpture. They were probably an important symbol in Boahen’s company.

A dead man full of bullet holes graces the bottom left of the flag, clearly a victim of Boahen and his company’s martial virtuosity. Underneath Boahen another dead man, presumably Boahen’s predecessor, lies next to a metal vessel called a *kuduo*, which was displayed at funerals. *Kuduos* were only kept by wealthy and important men, and at funerals were presented full of food and valuables. This particular *kuduo* has a *globus cruciger*, a British symbol of power and authority. Conceivably this image is intended to assuage any doubts over Boahen’s legitimate accession to office, indicating a smooth transition from his illustrious predecessor.

### Asafo Military Society Flag

Unrecorded Artist from Ghana  
Fante style, early-mid-twentieth century  
cotton appliqué  
Acquired with funds provided by the Walter R. Beardsley Endowment for  
Modern and Contemporary Art  
2000.031

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## MODEL BOAT

When Owen D. Mort Jr. purchased this model boat from a Cameroonian dealer in Arizona in 2005, his diary and other notes show that he had little idea about what he was purchasing. Although European and American museums have been collecting these boats since the 1880s, there are only a dozen or so known examples worldwide. Despite the fact that the model canoe was quite different from the rest of his Congo-dominated collection, it became one of Mort's most treasured pieces.

Competitive canoe racing has featured prominently on major holidays for many years in the Cameroonian port city of Duala, located on the large estuary of the Wouri river in the north of the country. During the era of the Atlantic slave trade, Duala, with its sheltered harbor and confluence of three major river systems, perfectly positioned it as a port. As the Atlantic trade grew, the local Duala fishermen, only around 20,000 in number, used their geographic advantage to establish themselves as middlemen on the coast. They bargained with European merchantmen, offloaded their ships, sold them food and provisions, and also provided them the cargo that they wanted. Once in possession of European goods, the Duala middlemen would travel upriver to exchange them for slaves, ivory, and other items in demand on the coast.

Although the Duala monopolized this middleman position that made them wealthy and enabled them to run large plantations and warehouses on the coast, the entire system was extremely competitive. Three major trading houses controlled the riverine and coastal trade as well as land holdings on the coast, and each one had numerous subdivisions. Originally, these houses involved men tied together by ancestry, but over time the most prosperous traders came to dominate the senior ranks. The "king" of each house, therefore, was a successful businessman-politician, who could make big profits while also redistributing enough wealth to underlings in order to create a happy and well-functioning enterprise.

The model racing canoe that Mort collected epitomizes the competitive aspect of the Duala political and economic system. Each year during the Ndongo festival, the various "kings" assembled for feasts, dancing, and wrestling and canoe racing competitions. Each major leader sponsored their own canoe, as seen in the illustration below. Canoes owned by individuals such as King Bell, King Deido, or King Akwa were large enough to have 40 to 50 rowers, while the King sat shaded in a ceremonial stool in the center. Each boat featured the relevant flag of its house at the rear, in addition to having an elaborate, painted prow ornament

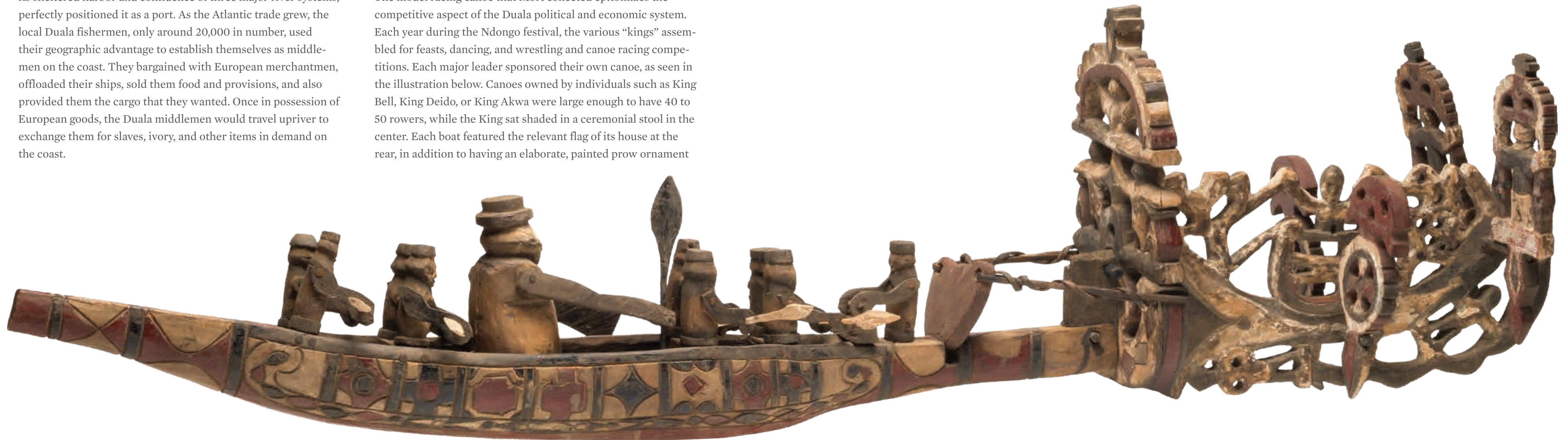
(known as the *tangé*) that featured an array of human, animal, and spirit figures. Once the competitions and festivities were over, the culmination of the Ndongo festival featured divers who swam down to the estuary floor to collect messages from the ancestors. Thus the Ndongo festival cemented mutual political and economic relations, while also acknowledging the prowess and largesse of the most talented.

What then is the function of the model racing canoes such as the one Mort collected? We may never know with certainty the answer to this question, since the golden age of these races around the turn of the twentieth century is long gone. It is often assumed that the model boat commemorates the victory of the winning

boat in the annual Ndongo festival race, although this has not been conclusively demonstrated. Another possibility is that various associations known as *miemba* (singular *muemba*) which existed in all the various regions of Duala produced the model canoes. In some cases, "kings" led the *miemba* although at other times ambitious young men controlled them.

### Model Boat

Unrecorded Artist from Cameroon  
Duala style, late-nineteenth—early-twentieth century  
wood, paint  
Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
2010.031.045







Postcard with an image of an Ndongo boat race in the Duala port, showing a racing canoe and a steamship in the background. Postmarked May 15, 1953, although the image could be from an earlier time. E. Morton Collection.

One such ambitious politician we know who produced his own model canoe was Kum'a Mbape Bell, AKA "Prince Lock Priso," the son of "King Bell," who built up his own private *muemba* to further his interests. Prince Lock Priso's model canoe eventually ended up in England at the Pitt Rivers Museum. Was it carved to celebrate a racing victory, or was it designed to strengthen the *esprit de corps* of his *muemba* members?

The Ndongo festival and its attendant canoe racing flourished through the colonial period, and adapted to the rise of German (1884-1915) and French (1920-1960) colonial rule. Under German rule, the festival was held on the Kaiser's birthday, while under the French it was held on Bastille Day. Once Cameroon gained independence, the festival declined, with the races being abandoned in the 1970s. Only more recently have they returned, and, with corporate sponsorship, have once again become a major

cultural and tourist event. Most of the replicas, though, that have made their way into museums date to the German period, were possibly still being made in the 1950s. The model canoes appear to be replicas of the actual racing boats. Each year just prior to the festival, the boats, which featured geometric patterning on the sides, were repainted in bright colors. All the best-preserved model canoes still retain their original paint, patterning, and flags, though most have faded colors. Each boat features rowers and their oars, and often flags and other adornments as well. Likewise, the canoe's patron is also rendered oversize and sits in the center wearing a hat.

Great importance is placed in most of the model canoes on the prow ornament, or *tangé*. In the model canoes, the size of the *tangé* is often exaggerated, as in the case with the one on display in the Snite Museum. Whether this is done intentionally or due

to lack of technical prowess is unknown, although there are good grounds for believing that the former option was the case since only a small group of master carvers who charged high prices for their work produced *tangé* for racing canoes. The *tangé*, in the minds of the participants, played a major part in a boat's success. "Held to be imbued with magical powers," the prow ornaments interacted with riverine spirits called *jengu* to achieve victory. Carved out of many different pieces of wood, the typical *tangé* consisted of various tableaux of painted animal, human, and spirit figures. The patron decided on the images used in the *tangé*, and thus used them to project a suitable image. Formidable animals such as elephants often figured, as did depictions of powerful ancestors. Many smaller pieces would often intersect a large main, multilevel piece aligned lengthwise. According to one Cameroonian observer, "The symbolism of the *tangé* has been variously but never conclusively interpreted.... The curvilinear, continuous themes, consistently including animals and men, appear to be—and are said to be—symbolic of power, aggression, and triumph."

Due to the length of time it must have taken to make model racing boats, as well as due to different power bases of their patrons, tremendous variability in their size and style exists. The Snite Museum's model racing boat has the largest *tangé*, relative to the size of the canoe, of any known models in museum collections. As result, the boat has only eight rowers and one coxswain, with the team's oversized patron dominating the middle section.

Much like the largest figure, the *tangé*'s relative size indicates its importance. And while the meaning of the imagery in the elaborate tableau is as elusive as the purpose of the model boat, some recognizable images suggest an overall theme. The most elevated forms are three human figures framed by what appears to be cruciform-topped grave markers. Two human figures bearing pots hold up the figure closest to the canoe. This suggests that the three figures are powerful ancestors, with the most important one receiving offerings from the living. The lower half of the *tangé* features several human and serpentine forms, perhaps suggesting the watery world of Duala ancestors and important spirits. These spirits interacting with humans on the prow of the boat seem to be indicating support for the boat crew. While they may have supported successful boat racing, given the fluctuation of Duala leaders, these ancestors and spirits may also have validated the status of the boat's patron.

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## ROYAL STAFF WITH A LEOPARD FIGURE

During the three centuries when it was a major power in the Bight of Benin, the Kingdom of Dahomey had an extensive art establishment primarily patronized by the royal family. A wide range of sculptors, metalsmiths, and artisans produced a vast array of objects, ranging from religious to commemorative, decorative, and political. Running throughout much of this art was leopard imagery, the symbol of the Dahomey monarchs.

Ever since the earliest illustrations of the Dahomey rulers were made in western books, they have been pictured holding royal staffs, various known as *makpo* (local term) or *récales* (Portuguese term). Although initially made solely from wood, by the late nineteenth century the staffs were usually overlaid with silver featuring intricate patterns and designs. Because each ruler was associated with a certain animal, most of the staffs are easy to date since the animal tends to be depicted in the crook area. The Dahomey kings appear to have carried their staffs around routinely as part of their regalia, usually by hooking them over their left shoulder. During processions and dances, the king would carry the staff in his hand, and gesticulate with it.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at the height of Dahomey's power, the kings probably had hundreds of replicas of their royal staffs circulating at any given time. One of the royal messengers would give anyone who was summoned to see the king a replica staff. For foreign merchants who landed at the sea ports, it was vital to obtain one of these staffs, since its possession indicated that one had permission to proceed to the capital on business. Proceeding without one was not a good idea. When foreign merchants arrived at the coast, they would commonly send their own envoy to the borders of Dahomey with a cane of their own to exchange with the messengers, indicating that they wished to obtain permission to travel and trade inland.

The beautifully fashioned royal staff at the Snite Museum appears to date to the mid-nineteenth century, around the early years of the reign of King Glele (1858-89), if not earlier to the era of King Ghezo (1818-58), and matches in color and style several bas relief illustrations on the murals of the Royal Palace at the state capital of Abomey. Painted primarily in blue and yellow, the staff features overlaid metal and coins hammered into the wood for decoration. A three-dimensional leopard, meanwhile, has been expertly carved at the top of the crook. One of the king's titles was leopard, reflecting Dahomey legends claiming that kings were descendants of leopards. This animal became a central royal symbol of the king's political, economic, and military might.

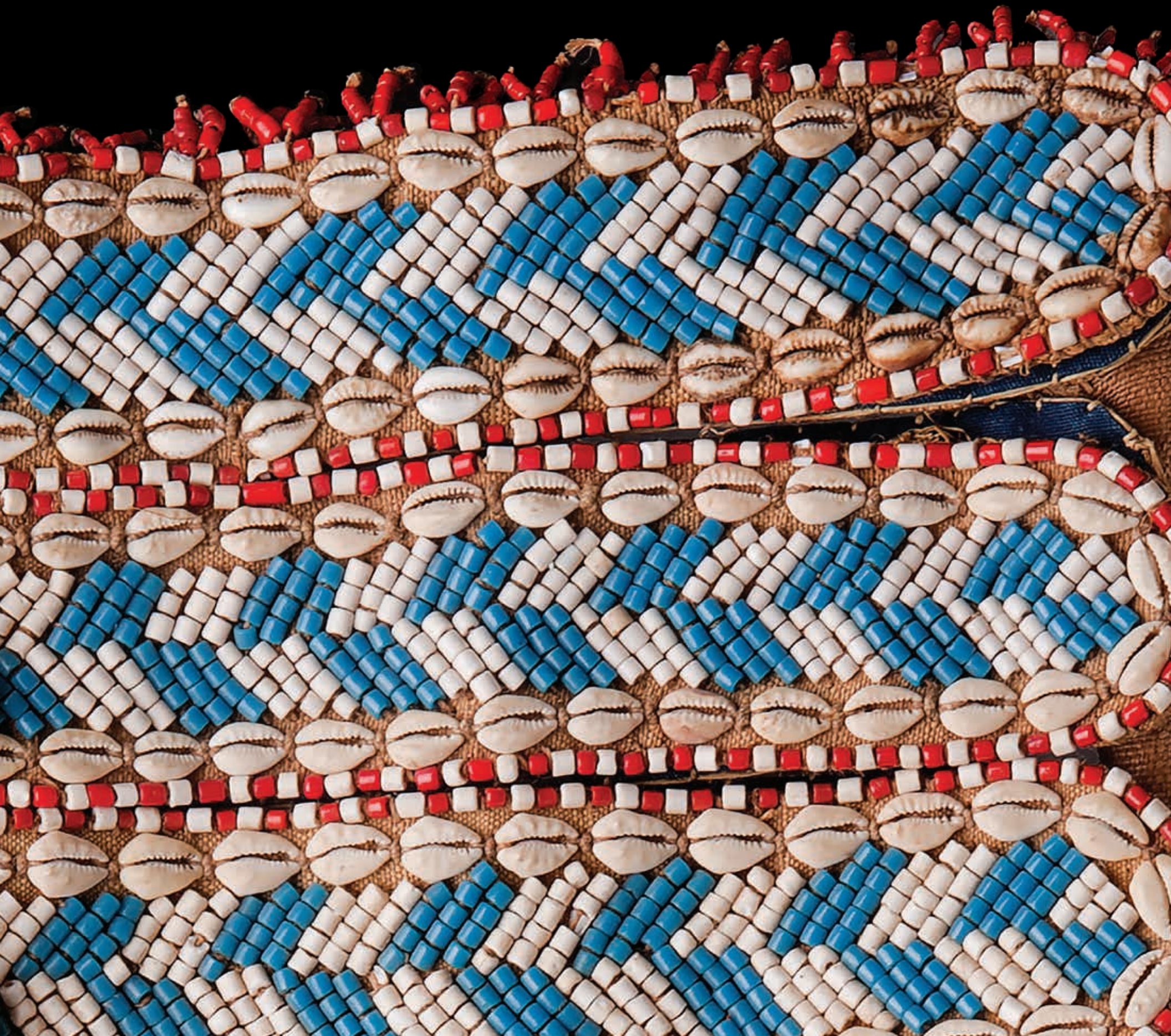
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**Royal Staff with a Leopard Figure**  
Unrecorded Artist from Benin (Dahomey kingdom)  
Fon style, mid-twentieth century  
wood, paint, metal, hammered coins  
Gift of Mr. Ernst Anspach  
1976.046





Africa had a wide array of political systems in its past, ranging from monarchies to bureaucracies to anarchies. Whatever the system, the senior-ranking men of the senior-ranking family in each society held the most power of influence. Those who aspired to greatness, though lacking the requisite ancestry, were forced to invent it and convince people of the veracity of their claims. Very often, even the most senior-born of leaders faced challenges to his legitimacy. Thus African rulers used art to underscore their authority, wealth, and sophistication both to their subjects and to outsiders.

Larger African kingdoms typically had their own royal craftsmen, or they were closely connected to lineages of craftsmen who passed on their skills to their children and relatives. Due to the wealth of the rulers and the skill of their artists, many of the more spectacular works of African art fall into the category of political power. Most rulers wore elaborate regalia in public in order to display their power, and the Yoruba great crown and Kuba royal beadwork in this exhibition exemplify this kind of display. Hierarchical and often secretive societies were common throughout the continent, and members often owned insignia to signal their participation and role within the society. The Lilwa society mask, one of the rarest masks in any museum collection worldwide, belonged to one of the most secretive levels of a male-regulating society among the Mbole in a remote area of the Congo, one which carried out capital punishment.



## ROYAL MUKYEEM ELEPHANT MASK

According to the legends and traditions of the Kuba Kingdom, located in what is now the south-central region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Mukyeem elephant mask and its attendant ceremonies were first created by the wife of Shyaam—a powerful Kuba monarch who expanded the kingdom in the early 1600s. Although initially a mask used solely in the funerals of Kuba royals, over time many of the nearby peoples who fell under Kuba rule also adopted it. In these areas men seeking status often joined societies and jostled for titled positions. By the nineteenth century, elephant masks were used primarily at the funerals of these titled men.

As was typical among the Kuba, the mask was fashioned out of leather, fiber, and raffia, and then overlaid with glass beads and cowrie shells—which functioned as the major currency in central Africa for many hundreds of years. The mask features a stylized human face with geometric eyes, mouth, and nose, along with a semi-circular head adornment that imitated traditional, ceremonial men’s headwear. Rising out of the top of the head, though, is an elephant trunk, usually featuring two attached small tusks. During ceremonies, red parrot feathers were attached to the end of the trunk—another feature that was only allowed to titled men. In these same rituals, a Mukyeem masker donned leggings, footwear, gloves, and a vest, which were identical to the deceased’s funerary wear, identifying the mask with the deceased.

The Snite Museum Mukyeem contains a number of visual symbols related to its use. The white cowrie shells evoke not only wealth, but the symbolic passing from life to death, or a transition from the living world to that of the venerated ancestors. The interlocking pattern of the glass beadwork is known as *imbol*, the Kuba symbol of rulership. The elephant motif has a number of related meanings. In a royal burial, the elephant linked the deceased directly to Woot, the mythical founder of Kuba society and its royal lineage. During the internment of a titled man, the elephant tended to signify either or both the political power and wealth of the deceased. Since ivory was the most valuable commodity in the central African interior, the elephant was often used as a motif for a rich man.

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### Royal Mukyeem Elephant Mask

Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
Kuba style, mid-twentieth century  
glass beads, cowrie shells, raffia palm fiber, animal skin, wood  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard and Susan Lee  
2009.063.004



## MAN'S HAT

Elaborate beadwork was a fundamental, visible sign of nobility in the Kuba Kingdom of Congo. The high classes wore beadwork daily. But during ceremonies and public functions, Kuba kings, royal title-holders, and other members of court often donned beadwork from head to toe. Masked figures representing mythic royal ancestors attending important ceremonies were also decked out in beaded regalia. Such displays of expensive imported glass beads and cowrie shells, which were a form of currency, exhibited the wealth, might, and sophistication of the kingdom.

The Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection at the Snite Museum of Art includes a significant acquisition of Kuba royal beadwork. While only a handful are on display, the collection includes dozens more items, such as lavish belts, necklaces, hats, armbands, bracelets, anklets, and more. Mort purchased most of these works in Kinshasa between 1974-1982 from a Kuba man, who was an agent of the king. Each of the works on display was worn by different member of the Kuba court. The hat belonged to a male title-holder, the extravagant necklace was worn by a princess, while the armband was worn by the king himself as part of royal regalia. The rear skirt panel, on the other hand, was an essential part of a complex royal masquerade costume. The mask represented the legendary sister-wife of the Kuba founder known as Ngady Amwaash. It was one of the few female masks in the Kuba repertoire, although it was performed by a male masker, who re-enacted myths of the origins of Kuba kingship in the presence of the king during important royal ceremonies.

As a whole these works give a good sense of the complicated craftsmanship and copious number of beads required to make royal beadwork. Artisans carefully selected the colors and patterns, many of which have symbolic meaning, to reflect the tastes of royal clients.

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### Man's Hat

Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo

Kuba style, mid-twentieth century

glass beads, cowrie shells, raffia palm fiber cloth and thread, embossed brass

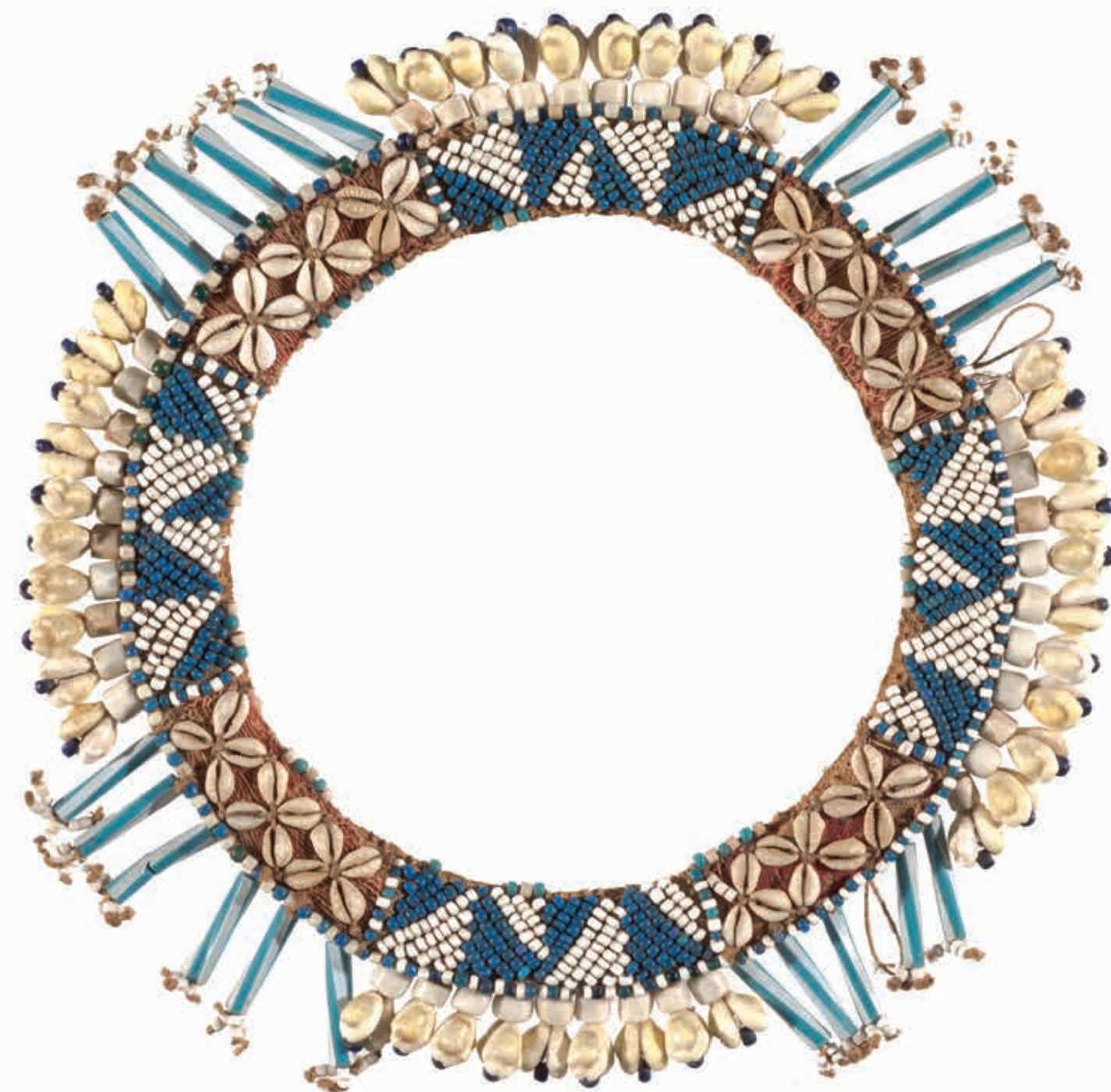
Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection

2017.025.437





**Royal Armlet**  
Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
Kuba style, mid-twentieth century  
glass beads, cowrie shells, raffia palm fiber cloth and thread  
Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
2017.025.447



**Royal Woman's Necklace**  
Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
Kuba style, mid-twentieth century  
glass beads, cowrie shells, raffia palm fiber cloth and thread  
Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
2017.026.015





**Rear Skirt Panel for Ngady Amwaash Royal Masquerade**  
Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
Kuba style, mid-twentieth century  
glass beads, raffia palm fiber cloth, cowrie and conus shells  
Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
2017.025.387





## LILWA SOCIETY MASK

In the vast forested regions of the central Congo, most of the inhabitants lived in stateless societies based instead on lineages and kinship. To make up for the absence of centralized authority, male-dominated “secret societies” typically controlled judicial functions, taking action in cases of serious malfeasance where arbitration failed.

The Lilwa Society, which was found primarily among the Mbole people, existed for centuries as a tightly-knit guarantor of justice and order in its thinly-populated environment. Although societies like it are common all over East and West Africa, the Lilwa not only had unusually elaborate and secretive ceremonies, but also employed capital punishment as part of their activities to a greater extent than usual.

Lilwa members carved almost all sculptures and masks used by the Mbole, and these carvers all assumed high ranks in the organization. Because divulging information about the activities and rituals of the Lilwa Society was punishable by death, researchers have found information about its sculptures hard to obtain and verify. The vast majority of artworks the Lilwa carvers produced were either ancestor figures or sculptures of the people who were hanged for serious violations of the moral code.

Lilwa masks are far less common than sculptures and are always associated with death. Usually produced in an eerie, stylized, oval representation of a face, the masks are always painted partially in white—the color of death. The Lilwa did not appear to design the masks for wearing. Instead they placed them in locations where their people would encounter death. Although the Lilwa commonly resorted to capital punishment, the use of white in masks does not necessarily indicate use for an actual fatality. All young men living in Mbole areas were expected to be initiated into the Lilwa society during their teenage years, and in doing so had to undergo circumcision, ritual death, and then rebirth in a complex ceremony. Following their subsequent circumcision by a blacksmith, a stinging white paste was put on their eyes. Following these and other ordeals the young men were reborn as full-fledged adults. Nor were death-related rituals restricted to initiation. Men aspiring to higher ranks were ritually buried

and then disinterred, so initiation into each level of the Lilwa was associated with the passing of the old self and the birth of a new one. Senior-ranking members of the society also had the masks present at their funerals.

The Lilwa mask at the Snite Museum is truly exceptional, and Mort rightly regarded it as one of the finest works in his collection. Smaller and rounder than other known Lilwa masks, the surface is patterned with a raised, curved “X” shape, whose meaning is unclear. This extremely rare mask was designed to be worn, and although no outsider has ever witnessed one like this being worn, there are field reports that suggest several possible functions for it. The mask may have been used to conceal the identity of an executioner, known as the Kumi, when a sentence of death was to be carried out. Such a sentence was carried out immediately following capital trials where the senior-ranking Lilwa members unanimously agreed on the verdict. It may also have been worn during secretive ceremonies when statues were ritually paraded through a village or during rituals of initiation into the Lilwa society.

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### Lilwa Society Mask

Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
Mbole style, mid-twentieth century  
wood  
Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
2017.025.822



## ADENLA, GREAT SACRED CROWN

The great crown, or Adenla, was the most important representation of the power of Yoruba kings and queens in Nigeria. The Yoruba belief that *àse*, or divine life force, resided in the head is central to understanding the profundity of this crown. Since the crown encapsulated and elongated the head, or source of power of a divine ruler, he or she was no longer simply human when wearing it. A crowned ruler was thus a powerful mediator between the physical world and spiritual world, which was populated by numerous deities, known as Orisha. In this state, he or she had so much *àse* that a beaded veil was necessary to protect ordinary people from a superhuman gaze.

The sacred cone-like beaded crown, such as the one at the Snite Museum, was worn infrequently and only during solemn occasions. Most importantly it was the crown for coronation, but it was also worn when the ruler was performing important state functions during sacred festivals or while granting titles. When it was not on the head of a ruler, the Adenla was treated as living spiritual being and kept in a sacred shrine. If necessary, the crown could even sit on the royal throne as a stand-in for the ruler.

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Like all Adenla, this one is decorated with two key symbols: birds and stylized human faces. The birds represent the mystical powers of women, which are a counter balance to male physical strength. They allude to the ruler as a mediator between the physical and spiritual worlds in the same way that a bird mediates between earthly and heavenly realms. The faces, on the other hand, represent royal ancestors and the continuation of the divine royal line. While the style and imagery on Yoruba great crowns is relatively conservative, the colors vary substantially from one royal ruler to the next. Since each bead color is associated with a specific Orisha, the specific colors represent the character of the ruler who owned the crown as well as the particular deities guiding the royal lineage.

### **Adenla, Great Sacred Crown**

Unrecorded Artist from Nigeria

Yoruba Oyo style, early-mid-twentieth century  
glass beads, cotton cloth and string, wood, plant fiber

Purchase funds provided by Lake Family Endowment for the Arts of the Americas, Africa, and Oceania  
2007.039





## KNOBKERRIE

The knobkerrie was a versatile accessory typically carried around by adult men in southern and eastern Africa. Featuring a heavy, bulbous head, the knobkerrie had a whittled down shaft. If long enough, it could be used as a walking stick. Many were much shorter, though, and were primarily used as a defensive or offensive weapon against human or animal attackers. Hence, they were a form of protection for men often out alone in the bush looking after cattle, combining portability with significant striking power. Many of them were notched in the head, which increased their ability to shatter skull and bone. Nor was it uncommon to add metal tacks as well to add to this effect. Many knobkerries were also overlaid with copper wire or leather, especially on the shaft, presumably to improve grip.

During the early nineteenth century, Zulu knobkerries from the Natal province of South Africa began to be sold into the tourist market. Many were elaborately carved, and the wood was overlaid with copper and brass wire. During the twentieth century, as dance competitions proliferated, knobkerries became part of an increasingly lavish Zulu male costuming style. Knobkerries, along with shields and stabbing spears, became entrenched features of Zulu warrior regalia. Thus the patterning and decoration of knobkerries became more ornate as they lost their original function and became more of a costume piece.

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This particular knobkerrie has been carbon-dated to 1270-1320 AD, and is one of the oldest known examples of its type to come from South Africa. Because of the fine wood and craftsmanship, it was presumably passed down over many generations through a hunter-warrior family. The brass tacks and wire, though, indicate it was refurbished in the nineteenth century, when the Zulu began to add imported brass to them.

### Knobkerrie

Unrecorded Artist from South Africa  
Zulu style, 1270-1320 AD  
wood, brass tacks, metal wire  
Acquired with funds provided by Robert E. O'Grady '63 and Beverly T. O'Grady SMC '63  
2010.023.001





## SOCIAL POWER



Social power typically refers to how the rulers and prominent individuals in any society transmit their status to shape the beliefs and actions of their subjects. Because most Africans lived in societies strongly divided by rank, much African art projects notions of the social power accruing to the wearer or owner of the object in question. In most cases, kingdoms and chiefdoms had a senior family, or lineage, and individuals were ranked according to their blood descent from the original ruler. Clans making up part of the kingdom were also ranked, as were the families or lineages within each clan. Polygamous families also had their own internal hierarchies. Hence, all people who were freeborn understood their social rank and could easily figure out the ranks of all those around them.

Beyond mere blood descent, individuals gained in social status as they aged, with adulthood, marriage, parenthood, and inheritance often serving as important transition periods in life, each with its own separate ceremonies and rituals. Specific dress or objects could be used during these transition rituals, or worn afterwards as a mark of passage and seniority. Elders also had far more social prestige than the young. Such markings of status were important for a variety of reasons: they showed who had been initiated into adulthood, who was married, or who was the head of a family. The Herero woman's headdress epitomizes this aspect of using forms of dress to signify clan and marital status.



## MARRIED WOMAN'S HEADDRESS

In many African ethnic groups, women traditionally wore clothing and other adornments that marked their social progression as they moved through life. In these societies, only women who had undergone the rites of initiation, marriage, or motherhood were allowed to wear certain kinds of costume. Some societies, too, mandated these changes in clothing, so that children, unmarried teens, wives, and widows were all very distinct in appearance.

Herero women, who live primarily in modern-day Namibia and Botswana, have always been and continue to be among the most strikingly dressed in southern Africa. Living in a society that was based almost entirely around cattle raising, Herero women raised children and prepared the dairy products that made up the vast majority of their diet. Since the Herero did not produce everything that they needed, many women were entrepreneurial, trading dairy and desert products for other types of food, tobacco, and also for clothing. Hence, the tall, dairy-fed Herero women were often out in public, and they wore eye-catching clothing that emphasized not only their size but their ethnic background which differed from those of the agriculturalists who lived around them.

Headdresses like the one in the Snite Museum were worn during the nineteenth century into the 1940s. Originally worn by the vast majority of all Herero adult women, the leather headdresses were abandoned as more and more people converted to Lutheranism and adopted in its place a colorful, Victorian-inspired German style. The leather headdresses were only worn by married mothers and were known as *omakossi*, or cow-horn headdresses. Married women were expected to sew their own garments, although they typically purchased leather and metal from local craftsmen. Many casual observers believe that but the trifoliate shapes at the very top of the piece represent the cattle horns, although in

fact they actually represent cattle ears. To see the horns, one has to look at the leather bridal veil on the front, which hangs over the ears and shoulders. The veil is rolled up to look like cattle horns, which then point down.

Sir Ralph Dolignon Furse, the Director of Recruitment for the British Colonial Office, originally purchased this particular headdress on a tour of southern Africa in 1935. While in the northern part of the Bechuanaland Protectorate (now Botswana), Furse encountered Herero in large numbers. As he recalled later in his book, *Aucuparius*, his driver “took me fifty miles south-west to Sehitwa, a village by the edge of Lake Ngami on the frontier of the Damara [Herero] tribe. I had been fascinated by one of the leather headdresses worn by the heathen Damara women which I had seen in the house of a district officer...” There he was able to buy this headdress off the head of a married woman, whose photograph he took before leaving.

The Snite Museum headdress testifies to many aspects of Herero life, which came close to extinction only a generation earlier. During the 1880s, Germany took control of its new colony of “South West Africa,” where some 80,000 Herero lived. Since the Herero pastoralists controlled most of the prime grazing land and water holes, the German authorities faced problems in their attempts to encourage immigration. All the best farm land was already being used. After authorities made varying attempts to cajole and eject the Herero from their homelands, in 1904 the local army commander issued an “extermination order” that authorized his soldiers to kill all Herero men and to force the women and children into the desert away from water sources so that they would die of thirst. This brutal campaign of genocide, which lasted for several years, eventually resulted in the death of around 80 percent of the Herero—with many survivors herded into concentration camps. Only several thousand



*Three Herero women wearing the headdress for a married woman. The middle headdress is the exact one in the Snite Museum of Art. Sir Ralph D. Furse took this photograph in 1935 just before he purchased the headdress. Snite Museum acquisition record file.*

were able to escape across the border into the Ngamiland region of northwest Botswana. Very few made it there with any cattle. The impact of the genocide was enormous. In the words of one historian, “Herero society, as it had existed before 1904, was destroyed. The Herero were left propertyless, landless and leaderless...”

Yet by the time of Furse’s visit to the region three decades later, the former Herero refugees were in a much more favorable condition. In fact, they were prospering remarkably and had undergone a renaissance of sorts. After arriving starving and cattleless in Ngamiland, they began borrowing cattle on loan from the local population. The milk of these cattle enabled them to eat, while each man earned a cow a year in return for his labor. Others borrowed on more or less permanent terms from local notables in return for their political loyalty. Due to the undoubtedly top-notch breeding and husbandry skills that the Herero possessed, by the 1930s they built up some of the biggest herds in the area and paid their loans back. Women, meanwhile, who had actually stooped to engaging in arable agriculture and growing crops for sale and consumption, by the 1930s no longer cared to do so.

The fine headdress Furse bought in Sehitwa comes from a woman who married into a wealthy household. Not only is the leather cured by an expert tanner, but the headdress contains numerous iron beads of good quality. Ngamiland was a region renowned for excellent metalsmiths, but their items were very costly. Thus the metal beads on this headdress would have required a significant barter transaction. The photographs taken by Furse also show that the woman’s two co-wives had equally fine headdresses, indicating a polygamous household with large cattle herds.





Front view of the Snite Museum's headdress worn by its original Herero owner. When the front leather veil is rolled up to reveal the woman's face, according to the Herero, the shape imitates cattle horns. Photo by Sir Ralph D. Furse, 1935. Snite Museum acquisition record file.

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**Married Woman's Headdress**  
Unrecorded Artist from Namibia or Botswana  
Herero style, nineteenth-early-twentieth century  
leather, iron  
Gift of the Martin Foundation  
1983.057



## ANCESTRAL RELIQUARY GUARDIAN FIGURE

The Mahongwe, Kota, and many other forest peoples of Gabon have long practiced ancestor worship, often in conjunction with a widespread religion known as Bwiti. While practices varied considerably due to both the dispersed nature of the population and the age of the tradition, most societies kept relics (particularly skulls) of their ancestors in baskets and other storage containers. These containers were kept inside or adjacent to the homestead, and reflected a widespread desire to maintain close relations with morally-upright ancestors who died natural deaths and inhabited the spirit world surrounding their living descendants. By honoring, venerating, and maintaining close contact with their predecessors, the Mahongwe maintained balance, health, and general welfare.

Most Gabonese decorated their reliquary containers with abstract guardian figures. For more than 130 years, Europeans such as Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, and Andre Derain collected work by Kota sculptors, known for their stylized depictions of the human face—which represented the ancestral skulls in abstract form and often alluded to status of the deceased in a number of ways. The flattened, convex, two-dimensional faces typically had some simplified facial features such as eyes and noses, and were supported by cylindrical necks that extended into a wide variety of bases attached to the reliquaries. In the Snite Museum's figure, the top of the head featured an extension, tilting backwards, that represented a braided hairstyle favored by titled individuals.

Because the dead were usually buried along with their wealth, valuable metals, such as iron, copper (and later brass) owned by the deceased were usually applied to the wood carvings in horizontal strips. For the wealthiest individuals, the metals would be wrapped around the entirety of the figure, while the more indigent would have far less applied. The use of metals to create facial features was further evidence of status. Because spears were highly prized possessions, it was also not uncommon for stylized spear motifs to supplant or supplement facial features. Before ceremonies, the figures would be polished and shined, and would reflect firelight during the nighttime festivities. Because the Mahongwe ingested a psychedelic drug called *iboga* as part of their Bwiti ceremonies, they believed that they were able to enjoy vivid encounters with their illuminated ancestors while in an altered state.

The Mahongwe and Kota produced these figures for hundreds of years, and this particular one has been carbon dated to 1470-1640. Because this period predates the era in which brass was imported into the Gabonese forests, the figure's surface is copper. Ultimately, these figures stopped being produced in the 1930s, when they were destroyed and buried in the face of the advance of Catholicism.

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**Ancestral Reliquary Guardian Figure**  
Unrecorded Artist from Gabon  
Mahongwe Group, Kota style, 1470-1640  
wood, copper  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James W. Alsdorf  
1991.071.016



## MASK

Traditionally, masking performances were among the most important social and spiritual events in Africa. When male wearers donned masks and elaborate body costumes, they transformed into supernatural entities. Prior to each masking event, the masker had to undergo spiritual protections that allowed the spirit of the mask to speak and move through his body.

Masks played an important role in social regulation in different parts of Africa. Masks often appeared at moments when members of a community moved between different stages of life, particularly during initiations of youth into adulthood and during funerals of important individuals. Masks also reinforced societal expectations and traditions during seasonal cycles and during significant disputes. In these functions masks were guided by religious rules, collective laws, and ritual practices. Because males initiated into regulatory societies owned and performed with the masks, they also reinforced powerful social structures.

The Guere were primarily farmers and hunters in a heavily forested area of Côte d'Ivoire. During the dry season, important men demonstrated their generosity by sponsoring days to weeks-long masking festivals in which a variety of masqueraders would perform long and often highly athletic dances. These masks, which represented wild spirits from the forest, brought blessings and raised communal spirits, but sometimes carried destructive forces to the village. Masks could be represented as male or female, and over time their powers could evolve or dissipate, thus bringing an element of uncertainty to performances. Formidable male masks would also sometimes appear at other times to settle communal disputes, guide initiations, or attend funerals. The only way to recognize the power and age of a mask was through an elaborate body costume on the masker and through its movements.

The Snite Museum Guere mask is a stunning male mask that embodies an aggressive forest spirit, indicated by the carved wooden leopard claws forming a beard and animal claws over the forehead. Other signs of its aggression are the metal tacks, nails, and staples as well as the attached animal fur. While the status and power of the mask are impossible to know without its body costume and performance, the accrued surface substances indicate that it was worn on numerous occasions. The male masker who wore it would have danced wildly, moved aggressively, and probably carried a weapon such as a sword, axe, or rifle.

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### Mask

Unrecorded Artist from Côte d'Ivoire  
Guere/We style, mid-twentieth century  
wood, pigment, white clay, red clay, leopard claws, cowrie shells, bone, wild animal fur, cotton rope, indigo dyed cotton cloth, 1923 CFA (African Francs) 25 centimes coins, metal tacks, nails, plant fiber, twigs, metal staples, ritual surface substances, cotton cloth packets with unknown interior substance  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David Christensen  
2016.049.008





Today, the vast majority of Africans are Christian or Muslim. Christianity arrived in Ethiopia not long after the new faith emerged in the first century A.D. Islam, likewise, spread to regions north of the Sahara and its southern edges when it was first introduced in the seventh century. Catholicism became the state religion in the Kongo Kingdom in central Africa in the late 1400s, leading to Christian objects being produced both for the Catholic church and for sects that later seceded from the main church. The Kongo Crucifix is a rare and excellent example of Christian art from this era. But it was only during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the vast majority of sub-Saharan Africans abandoned their traditional religions and converted to these monotheistic religions.

Prior to monotheism, traditional spiritual thought explained events over which people had no control. Chance, luck, or randomness were rarely acknowledged as causative factors. Instead African religions usually sought to identify and harness the supernatural powers that affected the fortunes of the living. Many African objects were created to control and respond to these various unseen powers.

Across most of the continent, Africans did not worship a creator god, although they almost universally believed a deity had created the earth and all of its inhabitants. While these creators were vague and remote in African minds, they believed that ancestors, and sometimes nature spirits or deities, played a much greater role in human affairs. Particularly important were rulers who had established societies and created laws and customs to live by. Even if long dead, their presence in human affairs was thought to be constant. Such ancestors could return in the flesh on important occasions as masked figures, like the extraordinary Yoruba Egungun mask. Ordinary Africans also revered their family founders and more immediate ancestors. Failure to please these ancestors, or to consult them in times of change and distress, was thought to be dangerous. Angry ancestors were believed to chastise their descendants who failed to honor them or to follow custom and tradition correctly. Additionally, most Africans believed in other spirit creatures which lived in forests, rivers, and mountains, and which often were malevolent. Hence protection was needed to guard against them. African art has multitudinous examples of art, ranging from power figures that counteract evil, to ancestral figures honored on shrines and during ritual ceremonies, that illustrate the need to communicate with the spiritual realm.



## DIVINATION BASKET WITH SIXTY-ONE RITUAL OBJECTS

The Chokwe people of Angola and southwest Congo have a far more elaborate divination ritual than found in most of Africa—a complexity that is exemplified in this exquisite 61-piece divination set.

Diviners historically played an important role in the lives of the Chokwe, who consulted them when they faced any number of problems or crises. Chokwe men engaged in a highly mobile, flexible, and diversified economic system, venturing into the forests to obtain honey, ivory, rubber, and other lucrative natural products. They also had a strong hunting and warrior tradition.

The Chokwe matrilineal system allowed the men to be mobile and frequently absent from their home areas. In this family system, married men were not recognized as the parents of their biological offspring. Instead, male relatives of the wife fulfilled this paternal role. Thus, men were often free to travel, while their wives farmed around the homestead. If this system was highly flexible and favorable to entrepreneurial activities, it also bred uncertainty. Not only did Chokwe men have to encounter the ups and downs of travel, hunting, and business, but their absences fostered fears of infidelity and wrongdoing by their wives. Additionally, the wandering Chokwe men seem to have had an unusually strong fear of displeasing their ancestors—a reasonable fear in view of their constant contacts with an array of foreigners.

Chokwe diviners were expensive to consult. Moreover, they did not provide healing services, as diviners typically did elsewhere in Africa. Instead they made use of their unusually large and varied divination sets to discern the forces that underlay their patients' problems and afflictions. Once they detected the deep-lying cause, they could decide on a ritual solution or practical remedy and restore the patient's life to balance.

During divinations, individual pieces, or *kapele*, came to the attention of the diviner if they appeared on the surface after the basket was shaken. Those on the top edges, or which lay upright on the surface, gained the closest attention. Many of the large pieces had multiple potential meanings, and could only be interpreted through their orientation and the context and qualities of the surrounding *kapele*.

This divination set, like many others made by the Chokwe, makes use of an extraordinary array of forest and trade products. Fibers made from a forest tuber make up the majority of the basket, along with animal fur. Ivory and animal and insect parts make up the individual *kapele*, along with a variety of woods, metals, ceramics, gourds, seeds, pods, vines, cloth, vegetable products, and coatings. Many are intricately carved and assembled.

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### Divination Basket with Sixty-One Ritual Objects

Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola  
Chokwe style, mid-twentieth century

plant fiber, wood, animal fur, brass, bird horn, calabash, gourd, red clay, corn cob, seeds, seed pod, chicken feet, ceramic, antelope hooves, unidentified ritual powder mixture

Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection

2011.036.009



## EGUNGUN MASQUERADE COSTUME

The Yoruba people of southwest Nigeria and Benin have been organizing Egungun masquerade festivals since at least the fifteenth century. Usually conducted by members of the local Egungun society, the ceremonies allowed the living to pay homage to and to interact with their ancestors. Meaning “power concealed,” Egungun covered the entire body of the masker to erase the human form. Although these mask styles varied widely from one region to the next, Egungun were primarily multiple layers of cloth strips that tended to feature the most expensive and beautiful commercial and handmade textiles on the market. Since elaborate clothing was a sign of prestige among the Yoruba, then the ancestors also had to be arrayed in the finest ensembles. Over the years, in a continued honoring of the ancestors, these layers of cloth on an Egungun were repaired, replaced and added to.

Accompanied by a moving entourage of drummers, singers, poets, and other masks, masked Egungun figures would dance and spin, creating whirring sounds with the cloth strips along with other noises that the outfit may enable. Bystanders who felt the breeze from the moving cloth received a great ancestral blessing. The masker could also sing, talk, or communicate in esoteric languages, and was believed to be controlled by the ancestral spirit embodied by the mask during the performance.

The Snite Museum’s striking Egungun comes from the Oyo-Yoruba region. Like all Egungun, the first layer of cloth, which laid against the masker’s body is a handwoven cotton cloth with indigo and white stripes. This fabric is the same type once commonly used to shroud the dead before burial. The indigo and white mesh under the beautifully carved Oyo-style headdress assured that the masker was completely hidden when this Egungun appeared at ancestral celebrations. The different layers on the Snite Museum’s Egungun are comprised of fine commercial cloth, some of which have been treated with additional dye, as well as hand-woven, and hand-dyed cloth with beautiful appliqué designs. The yellow tinge of the once white areas of the under layer and mesh face cover indicate the age and long-term use of this Egungun.



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- Fitzgerald, Mary Ann, Henry Drewal, and Moyo Okediji “Transformation through Cloth: An Egungun Costume of the Yoruba.” *African Arts* 28, 3 (1995): 54-57.
- Houlberg, Marilyn Hammersley. “Notes on Egungun Masquerades among the Oyo Yoruba.” *African Arts* 11, 3 (1978) 56-61, 99.
- Poynor, Robin. *Spirit Eyes, Human Hands: African Art at the Harn Museum*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1995.

### Egungun Masquerade Costume

Unrecorded Artist from Nigeria  
Oyo-Yoruba style, mid-twentieth century  
cloth, wood, paint, indigo dye, cotton yarn, feathers  
Gift of the Charles S. Hayes Family  
2008.039.002



## CRUCIFIX

Although Christianity spread widely across East and North Africa very early in the first millennium, the religion only reached the rest of the Africa much later, during the age of Portuguese exploration. In 1485, the Kongo Kingdom became the first Central African society to adopt Christianity as a state religion. King Nzinga (d. 1509), better known as Joao I, allowed Jesuit and Capuchin Priests to establish a national church, which became institutionalized and lasted for several centuries.

From the earliest days of the formation of the Kongo Catholic Church, crucifixes were common symbols in the country. Many were carried by the peripatetic priests, while others were worn by noblemen as signs of their authority and devotion to Christianity. Borrowing from Portuguese artisans, the crosses were made from imported brass manilas—a common trade item obtained from European merchants. Although the Kongo brass crucifixes initially followed closely from Portuguese models and remained like them through the 1500s, over time a couple of motifs unique to the Kongo emerged. First, Christ's eyes became enlarged and bulbous. Second, three or more praying figures were added, usually with two above Christ's arms and then with the Virgin Mary below his outstretched legs. Additionally, over time the body was stylized in a manner that approximated local Kongo art. The crucifix on display in the Snite Museum is a strong example of this seventeenth and eighteenth-century style, and has appeared before in the journal *African Arts*.

Increasing amounts of syncretism in Kongoles Catholicism, as well as a fusion of Christian and African art forms, lay behind these changes in form. A number of observers have maintained that Christ's enlarged eyes reflect traditional renderings of individuals who are possessed by the spirits of others. During the 1690s, a syncretic religious movement known as Antonianism was started and spread by Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita, who claimed to have been possessed by the spirit of St. Anthony of Padua—the Patron Saint of the Capuchin Friars. Although Dona Beatriz, who consciously blended Catholicism with traditional religious practices, was burned as a heretic, her church spread. Thus it came to be more commonly believed that Jesus was Kongoles, while spirit possession and ancestor worship were commonly fused with Catholic rites.

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- Bourgeois, Arthur. "Christian Imagery in African Art." *African Arts* 14, 3 (1981): 82.
- Bradley, Douglas. *Christian Imagery in African Art: The Britt Family Collection*. South Bend: Snite Museum, 1980.
- Fromont, Cecile. "Under the Sign of the Cross in the Kingdom of Kongo: Religious Conversion and Visual Correlation in early modern Central Africa." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 59/60 (2011): 109-23.
- Thornton, John. *The Kongoles Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.



### Crucifix

Unrecorded Artist from the Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola  
Kongo style, seventeenth—eighteenth century  
brass  
Gift of the Raymond E. Britt Jr. Family  
1980.013.001



## MALE ANCESTOR FIGURE

Ancestral veneration was an important feature of most precolonial African societies. Not only had ancestors created entire societies, clans, and lineages, but they also established legal and moral codes that governed the existence of the living. They were believed to live, although unseen, among their descendants and to watch over everything that transpired in the visible world. If displeased with what they saw, they could communicate with the living through various means, and could also take punitive action if their messages went unheeded. As a result, most African societies utilized visual representations of ancestors in shrines and other sacred locations.

This figure from the southern Congo is a stunning example of a carved, wooden ancestor that was kept in a shrine. Hailing from the Kalundwe people, who inhabited the western borderlands of the vast Luba Kingdom, it shows a mix of influences from both the Luba and also from neighboring peoples like the Chokwe. Whereas the Luba typically produced female figures, the Kalundwe venerated male ancestors such as this one. Although the reason for this is not entirely clear, it may be somehow related to a historic shift from matrilineal to patrilineal rule, described in Kalundwe legends. The figure's complex hairstyle indicates that it represents a person of high status, possibly a paramount chief. If the figure depicted is of such senior descent it would not be surprising, since Kalundwe elders from the three royal clans maintained ancestral shrines for their former rulers.

Kalundwe sculpture and art is quite rare, since the society was primarily agricultural and located quite far from major urban centers. As a result, the meaning of the spherical object that the figure holds is unclear. Many Kalundwe works may have originated from a workshop that existed for about fifty years before its demise in the late 1920s. This piece may well have come from a master carver from this workshop, as it was purchased and brought to Belgium in 1930 by a colonial official who occasionally visited the area.

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- Felix, Marc L. *100 Peoples of Zaire and their Sculpture: The Handbook*. Brussels: Tribal Arts Press, 1987.
- Nooter, Mary, and Allen F. Roberts. *Luba*. Milan: 5 Continents, 2007.
- Sutherland, Jon, and Diane Canwell. *Zulu Kings and Their Armies*. Barnsley, U.K.: Pen and Sword Books, 2004.
- Yoder, John. *The Kanyok of Zaire: An Institutional and Ideological History to 1895*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.



### Male Ancestor Figure

Unrecorded Artist from the Democratic Republic of Congo  
Kalundwe style, early-twentieth century  
wood, iron  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. James Christensen  
2007.050



# 3

## ILLUSTRATED EXHIBITION CHECKLIST





**ECONOMIC POWER**



**Royal Mukyeem Elephant Mask**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Kuba style, mid-twentieth century  
 glass beads, cowrie shells, raffia palm fiber, animal skin, wood  
 20.5 × 19 × 24.5 in (52.07 × 48.26 × 62.23 cm)  
 Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard and Susan Lee  
 2009.063.004



**Pipe Bowl: Opposing Male and Female Figures**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Cameroon  
 Babesi, Cameroon Grasslands style, early-mid-twentieth century  
 terra cotta  
 7.5 × 4.75 × 5.5 in (19.05 × 12.07 × 13.97 cm)  
 Gift of David, Gayle and Kenna Ackley  
 2006.080.001



**Pipe Bowl: Human Head with Bulbous Cheeks**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Cameroon  
 Bamun, Cameroon Grasslands style, early-mid-twentieth century  
 terra cotta  
 6.4 in long (16.19 cm)  
 Acquired with funds provided by the Walter R. Beardsley Endowment for Modern and Contemporary Art and the William L. and Erma M. Travis Endowment for Decorative Arts  
 2006.026.003



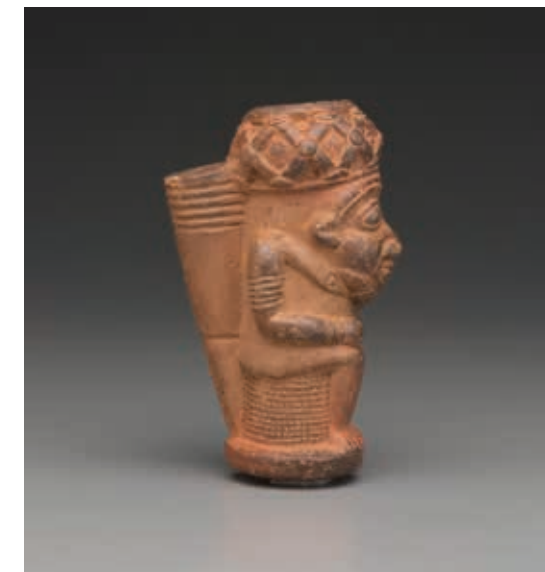
**Pipe Bowl: Standing Male Figure**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Ghana  
 Gurunsi style, early-mid-twentieth century  
 terra cotta, leather  
 5.1 × 2.9 × 3.3 in (13.02 × 7.3 × 8.26 cm)  
 Acquired with funds provided by the Walter R. Beardsley Endowment for Modern and Contemporary Art and the William L. and Erma M. Travis Endowment for Decorative Arts  
 2006.026.010



**Pipe: Seated Female Figure**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Mozambique  
 Makonde style, mid-twentieth century  
 wood, paint  
 9.1 × 11.5 × 3.2 in (23.18 × 29.21 × 8.1 cm)  
 Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
 2017.025.809



**Pipe Bowl: Kneeling Female Figure**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Ghana  
 Gurunsi style, early-mid-twentieth century  
 terra cotta  
 5 × 2 × 3.5 in (12.7 × 6.03 × 8.89 cm)  
 Acquired with funds provided by the Walter R. Beardsley Endowment for Modern and Contemporary Art and the William L. and Erma M. Travis Endowment for Decorative Arts  
 2006.026.009

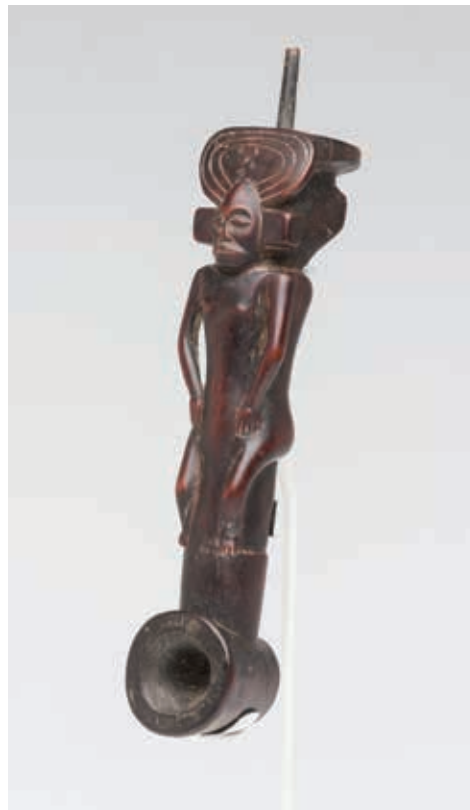


**Pipe Bowl: Seated Judge**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Cameroon  
 Bamileke, Cameroon Grasslands style, early-mid-twentieth century  
 terra cotta  
 5.9 × 2.3 × 3.6 in (14.92 × 5.72 × 9.21 cm)  
 Gift of David, Gayle and Kenna Ackley  
 2006.080.006





**Model Boat**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Cameroon  
 Duala style, late-nineteenth—early-twentieth century  
 wood, paint  
 11.4 × 47.3 × 7.5 in (28.89 × 120.02 × 19.05 cm)  
 Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
 2010.031.045



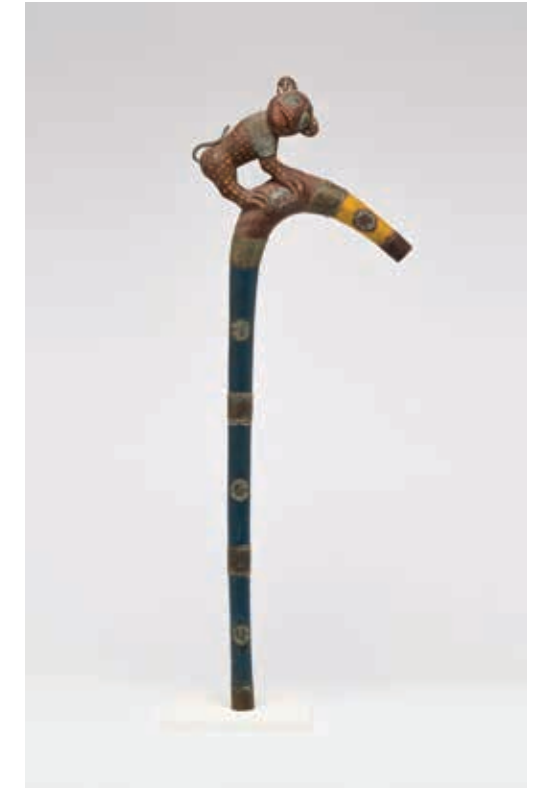
**Pipe Bowl: Male Figure with Chief's Headdress**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola  
 Chokwe style, mid-twentieth century  
 wood, paint  
 10.5 × 2.1 × 2.6 in (26.67 × 5.4 × 5.72 cm)  
 Gift of Robert E. Navin  
 2009.068.003



**Eshu Dance Staff**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Nigeria  
 Yoruba style, early-mid-twentieth century  
 wood, indigo, white clay  
 19.3 × 4 × 11.3 in (48.9 × 10.16 × 28.58 cm)  
 Dedicated to the memory of Professor Erskine A. Peters, Purchase funds provided  
 by an anonymous donor  
 1997.048



**Asafo Military Society Flag**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Ghana  
 Fante style, early-mid-twentieth century  
 cotton appliqué  
 44.8 × 63.5 in (113.67 × 161.29 cm)  
 purchase funds provided by the Walter R. Beardsley Endowment for Modern and Contemporary Art  
 2000.031



**Royal Staff or Récade with a Leopard Figure**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Benin (Dahomey kingdom)  
 Fon style, mid-twentieth century  
 wood, paint, metal, hammered coins  
 25 inches high (63.5 cm)  
 Gift of Mr. Ernst Anspach  
 1976.046



**Babban Riga, Great Gown**  
 Unrecorded Artists from Nigeria  
 Hausa style, early-mid-twentieth century  
 indigo-dyed hand-woven cotton, cotton thread  
 50 × 92 in (127 × 233.68 cm)  
 Art Purchase Fund  
 1985.062





**Prestige Cloth Panel**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Kuba style, mid-twentieth century  
 raffia palm fiber cloth and thread, plant dyes  
 28 × 22.5 in (71.12 × 57.15 cm)  
 Gift of Mr. Richard Driehaus  
 1980.091.003



**Prestige Cloth Panel**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Kuba style, mid-twentieth century  
 raffia palm fiber cloth and thread, plant dyes  
 23.5 × 24 in (56.69 × 60.96 cm)  
 Gift of the Raymond E. Britt Family  
 1987.042.014

**POLITICAL POWER**



**Adenla, Great Sacred Crown**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Nigeria  
 Yoruba Oyo style, early-mid-twentieth century  
 glass beads, cotton cloth and string, wood, plant fiber  
 40.3 × 8 in (102.24 × 20.32 cm)  
 Purchase funds provided by Lake Family Endowment for the Arts of the Americas, Africa, and Oceania  
 2007.039



**Horse and Male Rider**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Mali  
 Bamana style, nineteenth-early-twentieth century  
 iron  
 7.5 × 4.8 × 1.5 in (19.05 × 12.07 × 3.81 cm)  
 Gift of Dr. and Mrs. James Christensen  
 2007.044.006



**Marionette Puppet: French Colonial Officer on a Horse**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Mali  
 Bamana or Bozo style, mid-twentieth century  
 wood, fabric, paint, metal tacks, string  
 23.8 × 26.1 × 7.8 in (60.33 × 66.36 × 19.69 cm)  
 Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
 2017.025.667

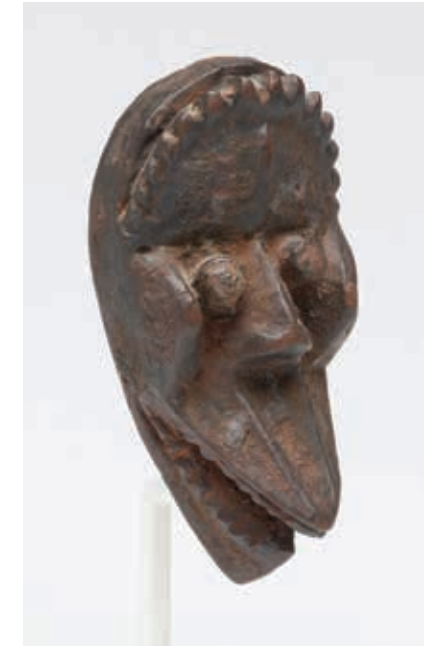




**Prestige Cloth Skirt**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Kuba style, mid-twentieth century  
 raffia palm fiber cloth and thread, plant dyes, ditto paper ink  
 26.5 × 51.8 in (67.31 × 131.45 cm)  
 Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
 2017.026.002



**Miniature Nyangbai Mask**  
 Unknown artist from Guinea or Liberia  
 Loma/Toma style, early-twentieth century  
 wood, encrustation  
 7.2 × 2.9 × 1.6 in (18.26 × 7.3 × 4.13 cm)  
 Art Purchase Fund  
 2010.005.027



**Miniature Glewa Mask**  
 Unknown artist from Côte d'Ivoire or Liberia  
 Dan style, early-twentieth century  
 wood  
 4.2 × 2.1 × 1.5 in (10.64 × 5.4 × 3.81 cm)  
 Art Purchase Fund  
 2010.005.036



**Royal Woman's Necklace**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Kuba style, mid-twentieth century  
 glass beads, cowrie shells, raffia palm fiber cloth and thread  
 13.8 × 13.8 × .1 in (34.93 × 34.93 × 1.59 cm)  
 Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
 2017.026.015



**Man's Hat**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Kuba style, mid-twentieth century  
 glass beads, cowrie shells, raffia palm fiber cloth and thread, embossed brass  
 3.4 × 7.4 × 7.0 in (8.57 × 18.73 × 17.94 cm)  
 Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
 2017.025.437



**Royal Armlet**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Kuba style, mid-twentieth century  
 glass beads, cowrie shells, raffia palm fiber cloth and thread  
 10.9 × 2.9 × .4 in (27.62 × 7.3 × .95 cm)  
 Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
 2017.025.447



**Miniature Deangle Mask**  
 Unknown artist from Côte d'Ivoire or Liberia  
 Dan style, early-twentieth century  
 wood, aluminum, thread, cloth  
 5.5 × 3.5 × 1.1 in (13.97 × 8.89 × 2.86 cm)  
 Art Purchase Fund  
 2010.005.026



**Miniature Janus Gela Mask**  
 Unknown artist from Liberia  
 Bassa style, early-twentieth century  
 wood  
 1.6 × .9 × 1.4 in (4.13 × 2.38 × 3.49 cm)  
 Art Purchase Fund  
 2010.005.021



**Rear Skirt Panel for Ngady aMwaash Royal Masquerade**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Kuba style, mid-twentieth century  
 glass beads, raffia palm fiber cloth, cowrie and conus shells  
 20.5 × 11.5 × 1.3 in (52.07 × 29.21 × 3.18 cm)  
 Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
 2017.025.387





**Lilwa Society Mask**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Mbole style, mid-twentieth century  
 wood  
 12.3 × 8.9 × 3.6 in (31.12 × 22.7 × 9.05 cm)  
 Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
 2017.025.822



**Knobkerrie**  
 Unrecorded Artist from South Africa  
 Zulu style, early-twentieth century  
 wood, brass tacks, metal wire  
 20.3 × 4.8 × 4.8 in (51.44 × 12.07 × 12.07 cm)  
 Acquired with funds provided by Robert E. O'Grady '63 and Beverly O'Grady SMC '63  
 2010.023.001

**SOCIAL POWER**



**Egungun Masquerade Costume**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Nigeria  
 Yoruba style, mid-twentieth century  
 cloth, wood, paint, indigo dye, cotton yarn, feathers  
 58 × 40 × 36 in (147.32 × 101.6 × 91.44 cm)  
 Gift of the Charles S. Hayes Family  
 2008.039.002



**Married Woman's Headdress**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Namibia or Botswana  
 Herero style, nineteenth--early-twentieth century  
 leather, iron  
 44 × 9 × 8 in (111.76 × 22.86 × 20.32 cm)  
 Gift of the Martin Foundation  
 1983.057

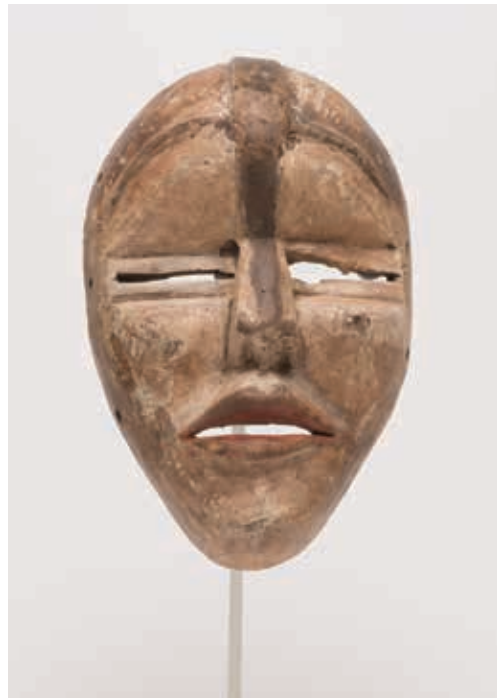




**Figure**  
Unrecorded Artist from Nigeria  
Mumuye style, mid-twentieth century  
wood  
40.8 × 6.6 × 5.8 in  
(103.51 × 16.83 × 14.61 cm)  
Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
2017.025.825



**Memorial Figure of a Man**  
Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola  
Kongo style, nineteenth-twentieth century  
stone  
12.8 × 8 × 4.4 in (32.39 × 20.32 × 11.11 cm)  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard and Susan Lee  
2009.063.007



**Gitenga Muganji Mask**  
Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
Pende style, mid-twentieth century  
plant fiber, feathers, clay pigment  
23 × 23 in (58.42 × 58.42 cm)  
Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
2017.025.540

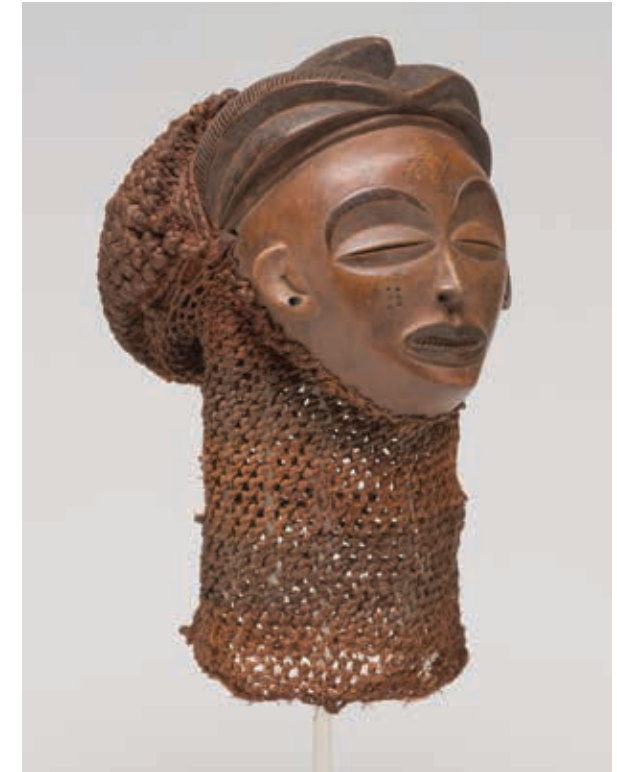
**Ndunga society Mask**  
Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola  
Woyo style, mid-twentieth century  
wood, white clay pigment, paint  
12.1 × 7.4 × 3.3 in (30.8 × 18.29 × 8.26 cm)  
Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
2017.025.725



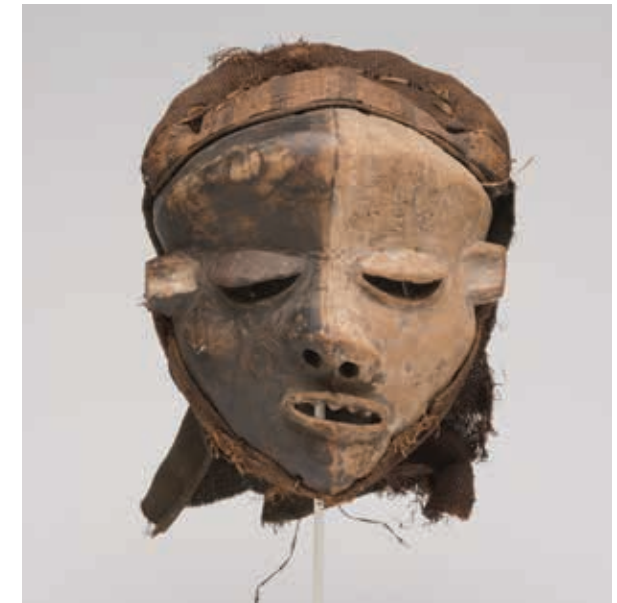
**Ancestral Reliquary Guardian Figure**  
Unrecorded Artist from Gabon  
Mahongwe Group, Kota style, 1470-1640  
wood, copper  
15.5 inches high (39.37 cm)  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James Alsdorf  
1991.071.016



**Kpelie Mask**  
Unrecorded Artist from Mali or Cote D'Ivoire  
Senufo style, mid-twentieth century  
wood, paint, cotton string  
14 inches high (35.56 cm)  
Gift of the Raymond E. Britt Jr. Family  
1980.072.032



**Pwo Female Mask**  
Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
Pende style, mid-twentieth century  
wood, pigment, plant fiber  
11 × 5.1 × 7.8 in (27.94 × 13.02 × 19.69 cm)  
Acquired with funds provided by the Estate of Edith and Dr. Paul J. Vignos, Jr. '41  
2012.011.001



**Mbangu Sickness Mask**  
Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
Pende style, mid-twentieth century  
wood, plant fiber, paint, clay pigment  
11.8 × 7.3 × 4.3 in (28.85 × 18.58 × 10.8 cm)  
Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
2017.025.963

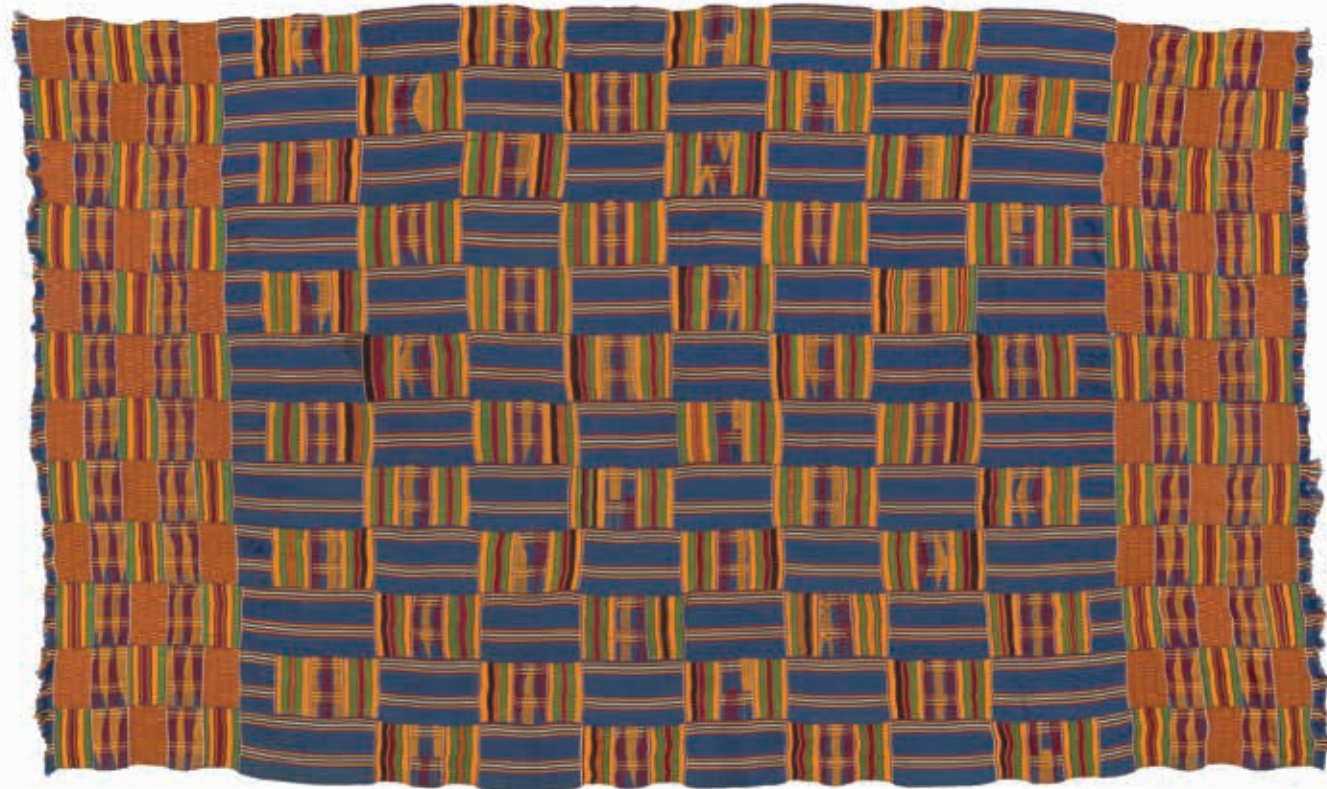




**Deangle Female Mask**  
 Unrecorded artist from Côte d'Ivoire or Liberia  
 Dan style, early-twentieth century  
 wood, plant fiber  
 13.8 × 7.3 × 2.5 in (34.93 × 18.42 × 6.35 cm)  
 Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
 2017.025.825



**Mask for Male Initiation**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Yaka style, late-twentieth century  
 wood, bark cloth, plant fiber, pigment  
 21.6 × 16.6 × 16.5 in (54.93 × 42.07 × 41.91 cm)  
 Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
 2017.025.729



**Kente Cloth**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Ghana  
 Asante style, mid-twentieth century  
 silk  
 44.3 × 75 in (112.4 × 190.5 cm)  
 Gift of Mrs. Judith Nash  
 1996.057.003

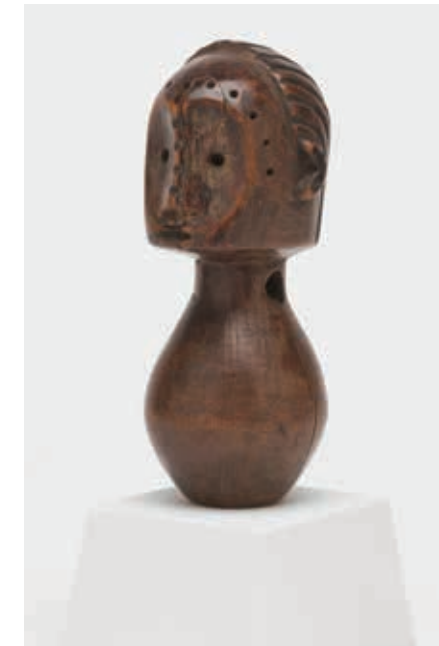
**SPIRITUAL POWER**



**Divination Basket with Sixty-one Ritual Objects**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola  
 Chokwe style, mid-twentieth century  
 plant fiber, wood, animal fur, calabash gourd, brass, bird horn, red clay, corn cob, seeds, seed pod, chicken feet, ceramic, antelope hooves, unidentified ritual powder mixture  
 3 × 12.5 × 11.8 in (7.62 × 31.75 × 29.85 cm)  
 Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection  
 2011.036.009



**Divination Rattle with Three Faces**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Hema style, early-twentieth century  
 wood, calabash gourd, feathers, seeds  
 8.1 × 2.3 in (20.64 × 5.72 cm)  
 Gift of Dr. and Mrs. James Christensen  
 2007.044.001



**Personal Charm**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Kusu style, early-twentieth century  
 wood  
 4.4 × 1.9 in (11.11 × 4.76 cm)  
 Gift of Dr. and Mrs. James Christensen  
 2007.044.002





**Fan for a Priestess of the Goddess Osun**  
Unrecorded Artist from Nigeria or Benin  
Yoruba style, early-twentieth century  
brass, aluminum  
13 × 7.3 × .81 in (33.02 × 18.42 × 2.07 cm)  
Rev. Anthony J. Lauck, C.S.C. Sculpture Endowment  
2005.055.001



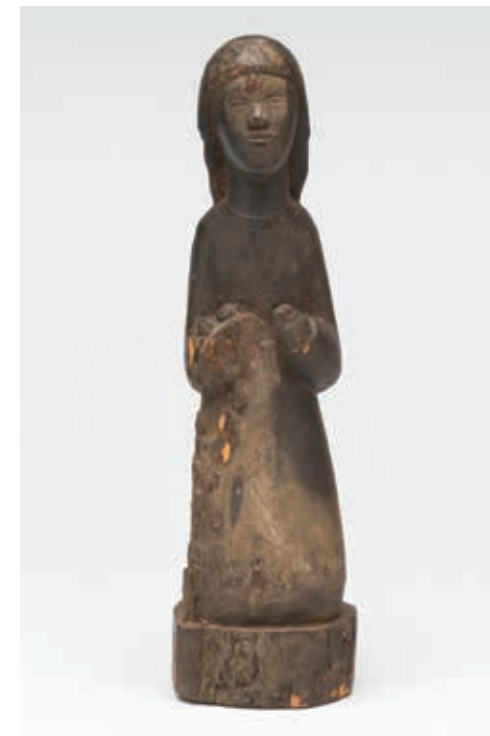
**Mbele a Lulendo, Sword of Power**  
Unrecorded Artist from the Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola  
Kongo style, eighteenth-nineteenth century  
iron, ivory  
34.1 × 6.5 × .8 in (86.68 × 16.51 × 1.91 cm)  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard and Susan Lee  
2009.063.016



**Crucifix**  
Unrecorded Artist from the Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola  
Kongo style, seventeenth-eighteenth century  
brass  
13.6 inches high (34.62 cm)  
Gift of the Raymond E. Britt Jr. Family  
1980.013.001



**Figure of Saint Anthony of Padua**  
Unrecorded Artist from the Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola  
Kongo style, eighteenth-nineteenth century  
wood  
15.3 inches high (38.74 cm)  
Gift of the Raymond E. Britt Jr. Family  
1980.072.006



**Kneeling Nun Power Figure**  
Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola  
Kongo style, mid-twentieth century  
wood, nail, encrustation  
10.3 inches high (26.04 cm)  
Gift of the Raymond E. Britt Jr. Family  
1980.072.005



**Processional Cross with Four Saints**  
Unrecorded Artist from Ethiopia  
nineteenth century  
wood, tempera, gypsum glue  
20.9 inches high (53.04 cm)  
Gift of the Raymond E. Britt Jr. Family  
1980.072.013

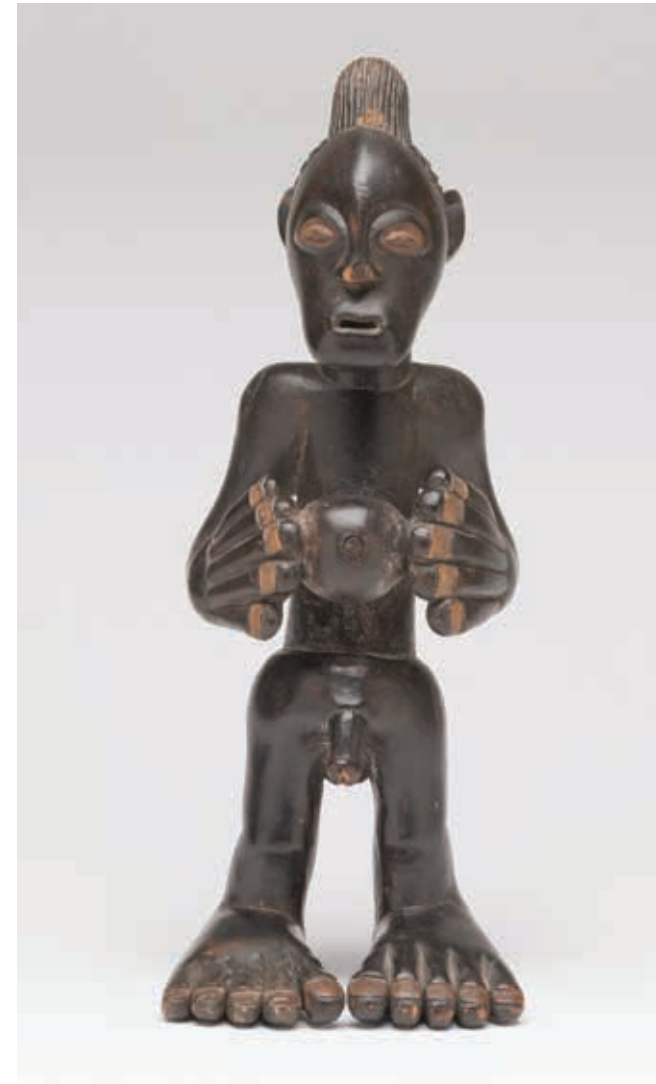




**Power Figure**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Songye style, late-nineteenth—early-twentieth century  
 wood, pigment, animal horn, metal tacks, metal chain, blue glass beads,  
 cotton string, plant fiber, red clay  
 17.2 × 4.8 × 4.5 in (43.688 × 12.192 × 11.43 cm)  
 Gift of David Christensen  
 2016.049.007



**Kneeling Nun Power Figure**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola  
 Chokwe style, mid-twentieth century  
 wood, glass beads, raffia fibers, metal tack  
 9.5 × 2.5 in (24.13 × 6.35 cm)  
 Gift of the Raymond E. Britt Jr. Family  
 1983.034.015



**Male Ancestor Figure**  
 Unrecorded Artist from the Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Kalundwe style, early-twentieth century  
 wood, iron  
 12.1 × 4.6 × 4.4 in (30.8 × 11.75 × 11.11 cm)  
 Gift of Dr. and Mrs. James Christensen  
 2007.050



**Female Power Figure**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Democratic Republic of Congo  
 Bwende style, early-twentieth century  
 wood, iron nail, iron wire  
 17.1 × 3.9 × 4.3 in (43.5 × 9.84 × 10.8 cm)  
 Gift of David Christensen  
 2007.046.001





**Vodou Beaded Banner of Agoue Royo**  
 Clotaire Bazille  
 Haiti, 1975-1985  
 sequins and beads on burlap interior, satin backed  
 31.8 × 24.8 in (80.65 × 62.87 cm)  
 On loan from Peter David Joralemon  
 L1997.006.004



**Vodou Beaded Banner of Erzulie Freda**  
 Jacmel  
 Haiti, 1975-1985  
 sequins and beads on burlap, satin backed  
 31 × 31 in (78.74 × 78.74 cm)  
 Purchase funds provided by Joseph R Skelton '71  
 1999.031.002



**Vodou Beaded Banner of Dambala and Ayida Wèdo**  
 Antoine  
 Haiti, 1960s  
 sequins and beads on burlap interior, satin backed  
 44.5 × 34.5 in (113.03 × 87.63 cm)  
 On loan from Peter David Joralemon  
 L1997.006.005



**Mask**  
 Unrecorded Artist from Côte d'Ivoire  
 Guere/We style, mid-twentieth century  
 wood, pigment, white clay, red clay, leopard claws, cowrie shells, bone, wild animal fur, cotton rope, indigo dyed cotton cloth, 1923 CFA (African Francs) 25 centimes  
 coins, metal tacks, nails, plant fiber, twigs, metal staples, ritual surface substances,  
 cotton cloth packets with unknown interior substance  
 17.2 × 14.5 × 11 in (43.688 × 36.83 × 27.94 cm)  
 Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David Christensen  
 2016.049.008



COLOPHON

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