

**AFRICAN ART:
GODS
ANCESTORS
LIFE**



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AFRICAN ART: GODS, ANCESTORS, LIFE

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in the audioguide "The circle of life"



AFRICAN ART: GODS ANCESTORS LIFE

“Africa now holds us close...” wrote the poet Vasilii Trediakovskiy in 1730. However, for a long time we haven’t had such an extensive exhibition of African art in our art museums. The current exhibition is the first one of such scale. The ZILART collection includes over a thousand artefacts; therefore, the exposition will be updated. The museum acquired the collection based on two factors. The first one is educational: viewers get the opportunity to look at the artefacts documenting the culture and life of West and Central Africa. Equally important is the second factor related to the designation of the museum as an institution of modern art.

The audience gets the opportunity to witness the often-declared in the art history role that this artistic material played in the development of the international and Russian avant-garde in the XX century.

In 1919, on the initiative of V. Mayakovsky and designed by N. Altman, “The Art of the Negroes” was published — a book by an artist and art theorist Voldemārs Matvejs (published under the name Vladimir Markov). The author didn’t get to see it: he died in 1914. But he managed to engage his circle — the progressive creative youth — with his photos and findings, and made history as Russia’s first African art theorist. Matvejs agitated his associates and Russian patrons to buy African sculpture, but distinguished the approach to it between the artists and the scientists: “Send different people to collect icons throughout the Russian land: entrust this task to an archaeologist, a realist artist and a modern artist, and you will see what each of them finds and how little will they understand each other”. With this comparison Matvejs declared himself as a visionary and art innovator: “The new generation of artists thanks Africa for helping them out of the European stagnation and impasse. Picasso learned from African sculptures. And so did Matisse”.

Matvejs’s views largely account for the character of the collection. It also defines the choice of the artist who collected these artefacts for over 30 years. The approach of Mikhail Zvyagin (1931-2022) — Leningrad/New York based painter, sculptor and applied artist — was not strictly “scientific”. He valued expression over geographical origin, provenance and even time period. However, Matvejs himself noted: “... even the latest pieces have faithfully preserved the old tradition feelings and understanding of beauty”. Over a thousand artefacts in this collection are associated with various ethnic styles, time periods and nations.

Speaking of African influence on early modernism, the leaders can be defined. For instance, the Kifwebe masks

of the Songye people (former Belgian Congo) are so reminiscent of cubism, fauvism and expressionism that they appear as the prototypes of said art movements. The masks are often exhibited in contemporary art museums alongside the avant-garde works. However, Kifwebe has its own purposes — ritual, healing, protection, training etc. — overall over fifteen functions according to specialists. New movements didn't delve into the ritual specifics, yet they intuitively recognised the suggestive potential of the mask and its magical power. The mask intervened in the course of life rather than imitated it. It couldn't have been better for avant-garde, dreaming to move away from contemplation and mimetic of "proper art" to a new active vision. Anonymous authors of the masks, who had never heard of anatomical plaster casts and the atlases mandatory for academy students, with great freedom expressed their understanding of, for example, the skull structure.

Yet again we have to quote Matvejs — hardly anyone could have described this phenomenon more accurately: "Take a look at any detail — an eye, for example; it's not an eye, sometimes it's a gap, a shell or something replacing it, and yet this fictitious form is beautiful, expressive — this is what we will call an expressive symbol of the eye. African art holds truly inexhaustible riches of expressive symbols: there aren't any real forms, the forms are entirely arbitrary, they serve real interests but through an expressive language". "Real interests" meaning the 15 functions referred to earlier. At the core of their execution lies the impact on the audience, the control over the rituals and the order in general. Passivity does not work here. Hence the aggressive visuality of Kifwebe: a black vertical crest, ridged surface, vividly carved large eyes. The masks are highlighted for the clear correlation with avant-garde of the 1900s-1910s, as well as due to the expansion of the expressive means of the XX century art.

The collection holds many stories of this kind. There are versions of a white mask that tied together the creative lives of M. de Vlaminck, A. Derain, P. Picasso and A. Matisse. Also featured are the magnificent Guinean D'mba masks, captured in sketches and paintings by Picasso and included in his collection. Next — the Baule figures from Côte d'Ivoire with slender elongated faces and tiny mouths, not coincidentally resembling the interpretation of faces in A. Modigliani's portraits. And funerary sculptures from Gabon covered in metal which were reproduced by P. Picasso, F. Léger, J. Gris, P. Klee. The exhibition provides many more examples of similar "famous" associations.

The collection includes a huge amount of art pieces of Tropical Africa. How to exhibit the art, revealing its artistic and narrative potential? The artefacts are organized in groups. Not on ground of chronology, geography, ethnos or style as one would expect. Each group is associated with one of the areas of life that the worldview of African peoples is based on. V. Propp, a great folklorist, in 1928 published his study "Morphology of the Folktale" where he identified the main functions — actions of the characters, around

which the plot is built. There were many — thirty one. The exhibition is built on a similar principle: archetypal motifs of African art are highlighted. It is important to remember that the analogues of today's museum pieces were included in everyday life and took part in rituals as sacred objects among ethnic and cultural groups in Africa. The exhibition is conceived as a map in which each archetypal theme has its own territory or island. Each island brings together objects of different ethnic origins from several cultural and historical regions of the continent. This immersion in unified, structurally dense configurations will function as a quest: on different islands, viewers will look for the pieces of one particularly interesting origin, recognize and distinguish images by their ethnostylistic features.

- 1/ Island of the ancestors: figures of ancestors, symbols of family, clan, dynasty
- 2/ The island of initiation: objects associated with rites of passage
- 3/ Island of prosperity: images of motherhood, ideals of masculine and feminine beauty
- 4/ Island of secret societies: masks and attributes of secret societies
- 5/ Island of power: figures and attributes of rulers, chiefs, priests
- 6/ Island of weapons: images and regalia of a hero, a warrior, a hunter
- 7/ Island of animals: animalistic symbolism, zoomorphism and anthropomorphism
- 8/ Island of the good life: luxuries and items of prestige
- 9/ Island of abundance: sculptures of earth and water spirits, attributes of fertility cults
- 10/ Island of magic: idols, fetishes, power objects
- 11/ Island of remembrance: ceremonial items for funeral and commemoration rites

After saying "Africa now holds us close" the Russian poet of the XVIII century Vasilii Trediakovskiy continues his poem with a prophetic — from today's perspective — definition of Africa: "And this island is of Love, as it is called, to which every man gets sent in their time".

DR
DR
A
01

BIRTH —

“The birth of a child is a return of an ancestor” — goes the saying of many peoples in Africa, and it is clearly reflected in their art. This proverb shows the importance of belonging to a family line, to a continuous chain of generations, a collective. When a child is born, the rituals determine which one of the ancestors came back with the newborn. The date of birth is not as important as the day of the week, by which various cultures decide on the naming. Famous Ashanti and Fante sculptures in Ghana are called *Akuaba* — “a child of Akua”, meaning “a child born on Wednesday”, by the name of a female character from a beautiful legend. These *Akuaba* are used as amulets for conception and childbirth, they are treated like children: fed, swaddled, and carried on the back. Externally, *Akuaba* does not depict an infant, but an adult woman. The Yoruba twin cults in Nigeria create *Ibeji* sculptures in memory of children who died in infancy — once again these are images of fully mature women and men.

In African sculpture, scenes of sexual intercourse and even childbirth can be occasionally encountered.

However, much more common and substantial is depiction of the theme of birth and transfer of vital energy through the images of motherhood.

In such works, images of young children are always present — they sit on their mother’s lap or back, or cling to her breast. Their figures are secondary, the centre of attention is the Woman, the mother. These majestic, stately sculptures are objects of worship. In such regal images, a revered female ancestor or an abstract allegory of childbirth and procreation can be embodied. Sometimes, a beautiful woman, affectingly embracing her children, could actually be an earth deity who not only generously gives lives, but also takes them back ruthlessly.

In order to show respect to the ancestors, they are portrayed in the prime of life, at their peak. On the surface of the sculptures are patterns of ritual scars, like those applied to people’s bodies during the initiation rites as a mark of them belonging to a tribe. Figures of ancestors often come in pairs — they are mythical progenitors of people, created by God the Creator, forefathers of a dynasty of rulers, or a relative collective image of worthy members of previous generations. Forefather and foremother can be portrayed as two separate figures in similar poses or combined in one composition: He and She are seated on a bench-like “throne”, and his arm rests on her shoulder.

Just like humans, the sculptures “live out” their lifecircle. The creation of a work of art (a mask or a figure) is also an act of creation, the birth of a form out of the animated matter of wood. The sculptor carefully selects the tree, guessing the future outlines of the object, and performs rituals before cutting it down. The surface of the workpiece is clearly marked out according to the canon of proportion: the head part, the torso, and the legs. The sculpture is then worked over down to the tiniest detail. The ancestors must look like extremely beautiful beings and represent the aesthetic ideal. During the rites, the masks not only depict spirits, but become them literally. The task of the craftsman is to bring into the world a viable object of power, one that will be ready for action at crucial moments in the life cycle.

BA/01***Eyema a Byeri* reliquary figure**

People, style: Ambete
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal.
 Carving

BA/02**Male figure**

People, style: Mangbetu
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/03**Female figure with a child**

People, style: Dogon
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Metal alloy. Casting

BA/04**Male figure**

Country: Cameroon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/05**Female figure**

People, style: Bena Lulua
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/06**Ancestor figure**

Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/07**Male figure**

People, style: Fon (?)
 Country: Benin
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/08**Male figure**

People, style: Hembra / Kusu
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/09**Female figure**

People, style: Zande
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/10**Ancestor figure**

People, style: Tikar
 Country: Cameroon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/11**Female figure**

People, style: Nyamwezi (?)
 Country: Tanzania
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, leather. Carving

BA/12**Finial figure of the *Mbulu Ngulu* reliquary**

People, style: Kota
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal. Carving

BA/13**Male figure**

People, style: Songye / Kusu
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/14**Female figure**

People, style: Igbo / Idoma
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

BA/15**Male figure**

People, style: Kuyu
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

BA/16**Finial figure of the *Boho a Bwete* reliquary**

People, style: Mahongwe
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal. Carving

BA/17**Finial figure of the *Bieri* reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/18**Finial figure of the *Bieri* reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/19**Female figure**

People, style: Grassland Kingdoms
 Country: Cameroon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood. Carving

BA/20**Finial figure of the *Bieri* reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/21***Ofika* male figure**

People, style: Mbole
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

BA/22**Male figure**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/23**Finial figure of the *Mbulu Ngulu* reliquary**

People, style: Kota
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal. Carving

BA/24**Paired ancestor figure**

People, style: Dogon
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/25***Singiti* male figure**

People, style: Hemba
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/26**Paired ancestor figure**

People, style: Dogon
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/27**Finial figure of the *Bieri* reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal, bone. Carving

BA/28**Female figure**

People, style: Kongo (Yombe)
 Country: DR Congo, Republic of Congo, Angola
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment, patina, beads. Carving

BA/29**Female figure with an offering bowl**

People, style: Urhobo / Isoko
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/30***Akuaba* fertility doll**

People, style: Ashanti
 Country: Ghana
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/31***Singiti* male figure**

People, style: Hemba
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/32**Female figure on a throne**

People, style: Akan (Ashanti)
 Country: Ghana
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, beads. Carving

BA/33**Female figure**

People, style: Igbo
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment, patina. Carving

BA/34***Mboko* vessel in the form of a female figure with an offering bowl**

People, style: Hemba
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/35**Ancestor figure with a child and an offering bowl**

People, style: Dogon
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/36**Finial figure of the *Bieri* reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal. Carving

BA/37**Finial figure of the *Bieri* reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/38**Ancestor figure**

People, style: Dogon
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/39**Head (figure fragment)**

People, style: Lobi
 Country: Burkina Faso
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/40***Okuyi* female figure**

People, style: Tsogo
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

BA/41**Finial figure of the *Bieri* reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/42**Male figure**

People, style: Bamum, Bamileke
 Country: Cameroon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/43**Ogbom headpiece with a female figure**

People, style: Eket
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/44**Female figure**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal.
 Carving

BA/45**Female figure**

People, style: Ibibio
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

BA/46**Tadep ancestor figure**

People, style: Mambila
 Country: Nigeria, Cameroon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/47**Male figure**

People, style: Luba / Hembra
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/48**Female figure**

People, style: Isoko / Urhobo
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood. Carving

BA/49**Helmet mask with an image of an ancestor, founder of the dynasty**

People, style: Edo (Bini)
 Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
 XX century (after a historical reference of XVIII–XIX centuries)
 Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

BA/50**Male figure**

People, style: Igbo
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/51**Female figure**

People, style: Kuba (Dengese)
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/52**Finial figure of the Bieri reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/53**Female figure**

People, style: Mangbetu
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, pigment.
 Carving

BA/54**Male figure**

People, style: Tabwa
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, plant fiber,
 beads.
 Carving

BA/55**Finial figure of the Bieri reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/56**Multi-figure composition**

People, style: Yoruba
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/57**Male figure**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/58**Male figure**

People, style: Bembe (Buyu)
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/59**Ogbom headpiece with a female figure**

People, style: Eket
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, plant fiber.
 Carving

BA/60**Tadep ancestor figure**

People, style: Mambila
 Country: Nigeria, Cameroon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, pigment.
 Carving

BA/61**Finial figure of the Bieri reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, pigment.
 Carving

BA/62**Tadep ancestor figure**

People, style: Mambila
 Country: Nigeria, Cameroon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, pigment.
 Carving

BA/63**Female figure with children**

People, style: Akan (Anyi)
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, pigment.
 Carving

BA/64**Ancestor figure pair with a musical instrument — balafon**

People, style: Dogon
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/65**Male figure**

People, style: Luba / Hemba
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/66**Finial figure of the *Mbulu Ngulu* reliquary**

People, style: Kota
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal.
 Carving

BA/67**Finial figure of the *Bieri* reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/68**Paired ancestor figure**

People, style: Igbo
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

BA/69**Finial figure of the *Bieri* reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/70**Female figure**

People, style: Mangbetu
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, beads.
 Carving

BA/71**Ancestor figure**

People, style: Bembe
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/72**Female figure**

People, style: Dogon
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/73**Helmet mask with an image of an ancestor, founder of the dynasty**

People, style: Edo (Bini)
 Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
 XX century (after a historical reference of XVIII–XIX centuries)
 Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

BA/74**Male figure**

People, style: Bena Lulua
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/75**Male figure**

People, style: Bembe (Buyu)
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/76**Female figure with a child**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 XX century
 Bone. Carving

BA/77**Ancestor figure**

People, style: Mambila
 Country: Nigeria, Cameroon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal.
 Carving

BA/78**Female figure**

People, style: Luba / Hemba
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/79**Paired ancestor figure**

People, style: Chamba
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, pigment.
 Carving

BA/80**Ancestor figure**

People, style: Hemba
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

BA/81**Finial figure of the *Bieri* reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal.
 Carving

BA/82

Female figure

People, style: Azande
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/83

Finial figure of the *Bieri* reliquary

People, style: Fang
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal.
Carving

BA/84

Female figure

People, style: Punu (Lumbo)
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

BA/85

Male figure

People, style: Fang
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal. Carving

BA/86

Female figure

People, style: Tabwa
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/87

Female figure

People, style: Mumuye
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, cowrie shells,
beads, bone.
Carving

BA/88

Ancestor figure

People, style: Dogon
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/89

Female figure with a child

People, style: Djenné-Djenno
archaeological culture
Country: Mali
XX century (after a historical
reference of XI–XVII centuries)
Clay. Moulding

BA/90

Ancestor figure

People, style: Dogon
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/91

Female figure

People, style: Tabwa
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, plant fiber,
beads, copper wire.
Carving

BA/92

Ancestor figure

People, style: Bembe
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/93

Female figure

People, style: Bete / Guro
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/94

Composition with male figures

People, style: Ambete
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment,
feathers.
Carving

BA/95

Female figure

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy. Casting

BA/96

Paired ancestor figure

People, style: Dogon
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/97

Female figure with a child

Country: Cameroon
XX century
Metal alloy. Casting

BA/98

Finial figure of the *Bieri* reliquary

People, style: Fang
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/99

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Dan
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal.
Carving

BA/100

***Eyema a Byeri* reliquary figure**

People, style: Ambete
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber,
metal.
Carving

BA/101

***Akuaba* fertility doll**

People, style: Ashanti
Country: Ghana
First half of the XX century
Wood. Carving

BA/102

Female figure

People, style: Mumuye
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal, plant fiber.
Carving

BA/103

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Dan
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/104

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Ibibio (?)
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

BA/105

Female figure

People, style: Yaka
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/106

Door bolt with latch depicting a pair of ancestors

People, style: Dogon
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/107

Mintadi male figure

People, style: Kongo
Country: DR Congo,
Republic of Congo
First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

BA/108

Male figure

People, style: Bembe
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal.
Carving

BA/109

Male figure

People, style: Chokwe
Country: DR Congo,
Republic of Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/110

Male figure

People, style: Bembe
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

BA/111

Female figure with a child

Country: Cameroon
XX century
Metal alloy. Casting

BA/112

Female figure

People, style: Luba / Hemba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

**FB
02**

INITIATION —

Initiation upon entering adulthood is a turning point in every person's life. During initiation into adulthood, young people first come face to face with masks and sacred objects. "A fearsome mask takes away and devours the boys, forever leaving its teeth marks on their bodies", — is how the participants in initiation figuratively described its essence to researchers. The mask takes away — adolescents are separated from their mothers and carefree childhood. The mask devours — young people have to go through symbolic child death and be reborn as adults, full members of society. The mask's teeth marks are the body's memory of successful initiation: patterned incisions and scars are a quality mark, an indicator of belonging to a tribe.

Initiation is a long training process and a difficult examination of maturity. In various local languages this period of life is called "forest school". The trials are held away from home and family, in a forest or a savannah — in sacred grooves where the spirits and ancestors live, and in special houses where the masks are kept and mentors from secret societies take control. In harsh seclusion, young men explore the mysteries of the universe, gain skills in hunting, combat, and warfare. The students often suffer from deprivations and painful procedures: a warrior can endure pain, but "a coward bears no scars". Sacred terror at the sight of monster masks with various animalistic features — real and fantastic — is gradually replaced by learning the supernatural characters and ability to communicate with spirits, as well as performing roleplay dances wearing the masks. Women's initiation rites are held without the masks, but there is one important exception. Among the Mende in Sierra Leone and related peoples, women and young girls perform dances in black Soweï water-spirit masks. Those who have never been between two worlds in the forest of spirits remain children forever: naive, irresponsible, and capable of breaking the rules laid by their ancestors.

The same goes for works of art. Masks are often given names, and their first appearance is arranged as a kind of initiation. Only after a "consecration" or activation (treatment with a magical concoction, wrapping in a special cloth and placing of amulets) do figures and masks take their final form and can be used for their intended purpose. Without animation rituals, a sculpture remains nothing more than an ingot or a blank, and the name of it will be different as well. Among the Teke in the Republic of Congo, wooden carving of an ancestor is called *Tege*, after treatment with *Bonga* (a mixture of grinded hair, bones and chalk) it becomes *Butti* and appears in a cocoon of hardened magical substance — like a warrior in armour.

IP/01

***Kpeliye'e* mask of the Poro secret society**

People, style: Senufo
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

IP/02

***Mwana Pwo* mask**

People, style: Chokwe
Country: DR Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

IP/03

Figure with a face of *Okuyi* mask and ritual scarification

People, style: Punu (Lumbo)
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, textile, plant fiber.
Carving

IP/04

***Kifwebe* mask of the Bwadi Bwa Kifwebe secret society**

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

IP/05

Zoomorphic mask

People, style: Bwa (Bobo-Oule)
Country: Burkina Faso
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

IP/06

Mask: antelope

People, style: Bobo
Country: Burkina Faso
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment, plant fiber. Carving

IP/07

Staff figure

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

IP/08

***Nkita* mask of the Kidumu secret society**

People, style: Teke
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

IP/09

Male figure

People, style: Grassland Kingdoms
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

IP/10

***Kikashi* mask of the Bwadi Bwa Kifwebe secret society**

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

IP/11

***Pipibuze* mask**

People, style: Kwele
Country: Republic of Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

IP/12

Mask

People, style: Urhobo
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

IP/13

***Echawokaba* (Ibulu Iya 'alunga) helmet mask of the Alunga secret society**

People, style: Bembe
Country: DR Congo, Zambia
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

IP/14

Mask of the Ngil secret society

People, style: Fang
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

IP/15

***Okuyi* mask**

People, style: Punu
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

IP/16

***Nkita* mask of the Kidumu secret society**

People, style: Teke
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, mixed media.
Carving

IP/17

***Geno* mask of the Poro secret society**

People, style: Bassa
Country: Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

IP/18

Agbogho mmuo

("maiden spirit") mask

People, style: Igbo
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

IP /19

Mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Guere
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment, textile,
leather, metal.
Carving

IP /20

Mask

People, style: Lulua
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

IP /21

Oshe Shango figure

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

The figure depicts an initiate to the cult of the deity Shango and is topped with its symbol — the double-headed *Oshe* hatchet

IP /22

Mbala mask of the Ngoni secret society

People, style: Yaka
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

IP /23

Mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Guere
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, feathers, nails.
Carving

IP /24

Ngabo shield with an image of a mask of the Bwadi Bwa Kifwebe secret society

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

IP /25

Portrait mask

People, style: Idoma
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment. Carving

IP /26

Hemba mask of the Nsubi secret society

People, style: Suku
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

IP /27

Idimu mask of the Bwami secret society

People, style: Lega
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

IP /28

Mask

People, style: Bembe
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

IP /29

Kikashi mask of the Bwadi Bwa Kifwebe secret society

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, horn, teeth,
cowrie shells, plant fiber.
Carving

IP /30

Mask

People, style: Kuba / Lele
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

IP /31

Sakimatwematwe figure of the Bwami secret society

People, style: Lega
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, feathers.
Carving

The multifaceted figure depicts elephant hunters and symbolises collective solidarity in achieving common goals

IP /32

Mask

People, style: Luba (?)
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, plant fiber.
Carving

IP /33

Kpanyi mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Guere
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment, leather.
Carving

IP /34

Mask

People, style: Tetela
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

PASSAGE

IP /35

Female figure with ritual scarification

People, style: Lulua
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

IP/36

Magical figure with a face of Okukwe mask

People, style: Galoa
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment,
feathers, plant fiber.
Carving

IP/37

Magical figure with a face of Okuyi mask and ritual scarification

People, style: Punu (Lumbo)
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

IP/38

Wan-balinga mask of the Sukomse society

People, style: Mossi
Country: Burkina Faso
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, feathers.
Carving

IP/39

Fumu a Mfumu mask

People, style: Pende
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

IP/40

Magical figure with a face of Okuyi mask and ritual scarification

People, style: Punu (Lumbo)
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

IP/41

Kikashi mask of the Bwadi Bwa Kifwebe secret society

People, style: Luba / Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

IP/42

Lukwakwongo mask of the Bwami secret society

People, style: Lega
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

IP/43

Oshe Shango figure

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, beads. Carving
The figure depicts an initiate to the cult of the deity Shango and is topped with its symbol — the double-headed Oshe hatchet

IP/44

Gifogo helmet mask

People, style: Pende
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, patina.
Carving

IP/45

Nuba helmet mask

People, style: Lele
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, beads, cowrie shells, feathers. Carving

IP/46

Ndangala mask

People, style: Ngbaka
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment. Carving

IP/47

Fumu a Mfumu mask

People, style: Pende
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

IP/48

Kpeliye'e mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Senufo
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy. Casting

IP/49

Mask

People, style: Ejagham (Boki)
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, patina, metal, feathers. Carving

IP/50

Staff figure

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

IP/51

Mask of the Ngil secret society

People, style: Fang
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

IP /52

Helmet mask

People, style: Igbo (?)
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

IP /53

Soweï helmet mask of the Sande (Bundu) female secret society

People, style: Mende
Country: Sierra Leone
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment. Carving

IP /54

Magical figure with a face of Okukwe mask and ritual scarification

People, style: Galoa
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment,
feathers, plant fiber. Carving

IP /55

Mbuya mask

People, style: Pende
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

IP /56

Mask of the Do secret society

People, style: Jimini
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

IP /57

Helmet mask

People, style: Igbo (?)
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment, plant
fiber. Carving

IP /58

Mask of the Bwadi Bwa Kifwebe secret society

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment. Carving

IP /59

Pipibuze mask of the Bwete secret society

People, style: Kwele
Country: Republic of Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment, plant
fiber. Carving

IP /60

Headdress mask of the Ekpe secret society

People, style: Ejagham (Ekoi)
Country: Nigeria, Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, leather, plant
fiber. Carving

IP /61

Zoomorphic mask

People, style: Bwa
Country: Burkina Faso
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment. Carving



03

FAMILY —

A big African family is a complex multi-level system that unites several generations and lines of kinship. Marriage is more about the union of two communities rather than two hearts. Abundant offspring is the main treasure; and having many children is a married woman's highest achievement. "A child belongs to each and everyone, the whole village raises them" — hence why second-cousins-ones-removed are just as dear as one's own children. The older generation demands respect, and the ancestors, veneration. Everyone knows their place within a strict hierarchy, yet within the bonds of familial solidarity no one is cast adrift. Professions are often familial; among many peoples in West Africa, traditional sculptors and blacksmiths form a special closed caste. Marriage is often allowed only within the group: men work in blacksmithing and sculpture, and women make pottery.

Family models are depicted in the canons of art.

Artworks are used in rituals aimed at the increase of family prosperity.

Masks and sculptures represent the images of ancestors, venerated relatives from previous generations. In ritual usage, the masks are grouped in families by seniority, their characters are named after kinship terms: "fathers", "sons", "husbands", "wives". In paired ancestor figures, the theme of the complementarity of masculine and feminine principles is expressed with particular clarity. The characters often appear with traditional occupation attributes: a woman with a spoon, pestle and mortar as the keeper of the family hearth; an armed man on horseback as the warrior and protector. A mother with children is pictured seated on a carved bench, symbolising a woman's high social status. In ancestral sanctuaries, statues are placed in groups with the main character in the centre, like in a family portrait. The means of figurative expression of age and family status make it possible to identify who is who. In the Bambara iconography in Mali, the nyeleni figures for initiations of young women have high pointed breasts, and Guandusu female sculptures for fertility cults have heavy breasts, as if filled with mother's milk.

There are also unusual relatives — captured in sculptural images, they require special treatment. Two-faced masks, Ere lbeji statues by the Yoruba people from Nigeria, Venavi by Ewe from Togo, Flanitokele by Bambara from Mali and others are associated with the twin cults. If during labour one of the twins or triplets dies, the mother and living brothers and sisters have to feed and nurse a sculptural statue as if it were the deceased family member. Blolo Bian and Blolo Bla are elegant male and female figures by Baule people in Côte d'Ivoire, depicting spouses from Blolo, an otherworldly ancestral village. Coming to this world, each person leaves their significant other in Blolo. Upon marriage, it is important to please the spiritual partner from Blolo in order to avoid their jealousy. The Blolo Bian and Blolo Bla figures are surrounded with care and love, decorated, and offered gifts. Their slender chiselled bodies and faces with delicate features are endowed with sublime and inspired beauty.

FM/01

Blolo Bla and Blolo Bian figure pair ("the spiritual partners")

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/02

Female figure

People, style: Grassland Kingdoms (Bamum, Bamileke)
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy. Casting

FM/03

Ujamaa multi-figure composition

People, style: Makonde
Country: Tanzania, Mozambique
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

Ujamaa sculptures ("family", "communality", "socialism" in Swahili language) in Tanzania are considered modern art and symbolise the unity of family, community, people.

FM/04

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Bena Lulua
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/05

Female figure

People, style: Dogon
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood. Carving

FM/06

Blolo Bian male figure

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/07

Phemba figure of a mother with child

People, style: Kongo (Yombe)
Country: DR Congo, Republic of Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/08

Female figure

People, style: Mangbetu
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/09

Male figure

People, style: Bena Lulua
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/10

Door of the *Ginna* ancestral house or a granary

People, style: Dogon
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood. Carving

FM/11

Ere Ibeji female twin figure

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, patina, beads.
Carving

FM/12

Female figure

People, style: Fang
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina.
Carving

FM/13

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Senufo
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/14

Female figure

People, style: Attie / Anyi
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

FM/15

Blolo Bla female figure

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/16

Ere Ibeji female twin figure

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/17

Female figure

People, style: Urhobo / Igbo
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/18

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Dan
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/19

Male figure

People, style: Kusu / Basikasingo
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/20

Figure of a mother with children on a throne

People, style: Grassland Kingdoms (Bamum, Bamileke)
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy. Casting

FM/21

Blolo Bla female figure

People, style: Attie
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, beads. Carving

F/22

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Akan
Country: Ghana
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy. Casting

FM/23

Figure of a mother with children

People, style: Grassland Kingdoms (Bamum, Bamileke)
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy. Casting

FM/24

Mother with child

People, style: Dogon (Tellem)
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/25

Pipibuze mask

People, style: Kwele
Country: Republic of Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

Currently, the mask has become a wedding symbol: during the ceremony, the bride and groom each hold it from their respective side. For the depiction of three faces at the centre of the mask and on the horns, the mask got a new name — *Trinite* (Trinity)

FM/26

Male figure

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/27

Male figure

People, style: Igbo
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

FM/28

Female figure

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/29

Blolo Bla female figure

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/30

D'mba mask

People, style: Baga
Country: Guinea
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/31

Blolo Bla female figure

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Ivory. Carving

FM/32

Door of the Ginna ancestral house or a granary

People, style: Dogon
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood. Carving

FM/33

Blolo Bian male figure

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/34

Female figure with child

People, style: Dan
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, cowrie shells.
Carving

FM/35

Male figure

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/36

Blolo Bian male figure

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/37

Female figure

People, style: Igbo
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

FM/38

Nda mask depicting twins

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/39

Female figure

People, style: Urhobo
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment. Carving

FM/40

Female figure

People, style: Dan / Guere
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/41

Female figure with child

People, style: Dan
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/42

Akuaba fertility doll with child

People, style: Fante
Country: Ghana
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, textile, beads.
Carving

FM/43

Vessel with male and female figures

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/44

Female figure

People, style: Luba / Hembra
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/45

Epa helmet mask with a figure of a mother with children

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment. Carving

FM/46

Blolo Bian male figure

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/47

Female figure

People, style: Igbo, Urhobo
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/48

Figure of a mother with children

People, style: Bambara / Senufo
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/49

Blolo Bian male figure

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, textile, beads.
Carving

FM/50

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Bena Lulua
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/51

Blolo Bian male figure

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/52

Male figure

People, style: Luba / Hembra
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/53

Male figure

People, style: Mangbetu
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/54

Paired ancestor figure

People, style: Dogon
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/55

Bandeguele figure of a man, woman and child on horseback

People, style: Senufo
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy. Casting

FM/56

Blolo Bia female figure

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/57

Blolo Bia female figure

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

FM/58

Alusi female figure with child

People, style: Igbo
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

FM/59

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Grassland Kingdoms
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, cowrie shells, beads. Carving

FM/60**Male figure**

People, style: Chokwe
 Country: DR Congo, Angola
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/61**Paired male and female figures**

People, style: Yaka / Tabwa
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/62**Akuaba fertility doll with child**

People, style: Ashanti
 Country: Ghana
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/63**Male figure**

People, style: Luba / Hamba
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, plant fiber.
 Carving

FM/64**Female figure**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/65**Blole Bla female figure**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, plant fiber.
 Carving

FM/66**Female figure on a throne**

People, style: Yaka
 Country: DR Congo, Angola
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/67**Female figure with child**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/68**Female figure**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/69**Figure of a mother with child**

People, style: Chokwe
 Country: DR Congo, Angola
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, plant fiber.
 Carving

FM/70**Blole Bian male figure**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/71**Blole Bian male figure**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, textile. Carving

FM/72**Figure of a mother with children**

People, style: Attie / Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/73**Blole Bla female figure**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/74**Female figure**

People, style: Kuba (Dengese)
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/75**Male figure**

People, style: Igbo
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

FM/76**Male figure**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/77**Closet in the shape of a human figure**

People, style: Dogon
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood. Carving

FM/78**Figure of a mother with child**

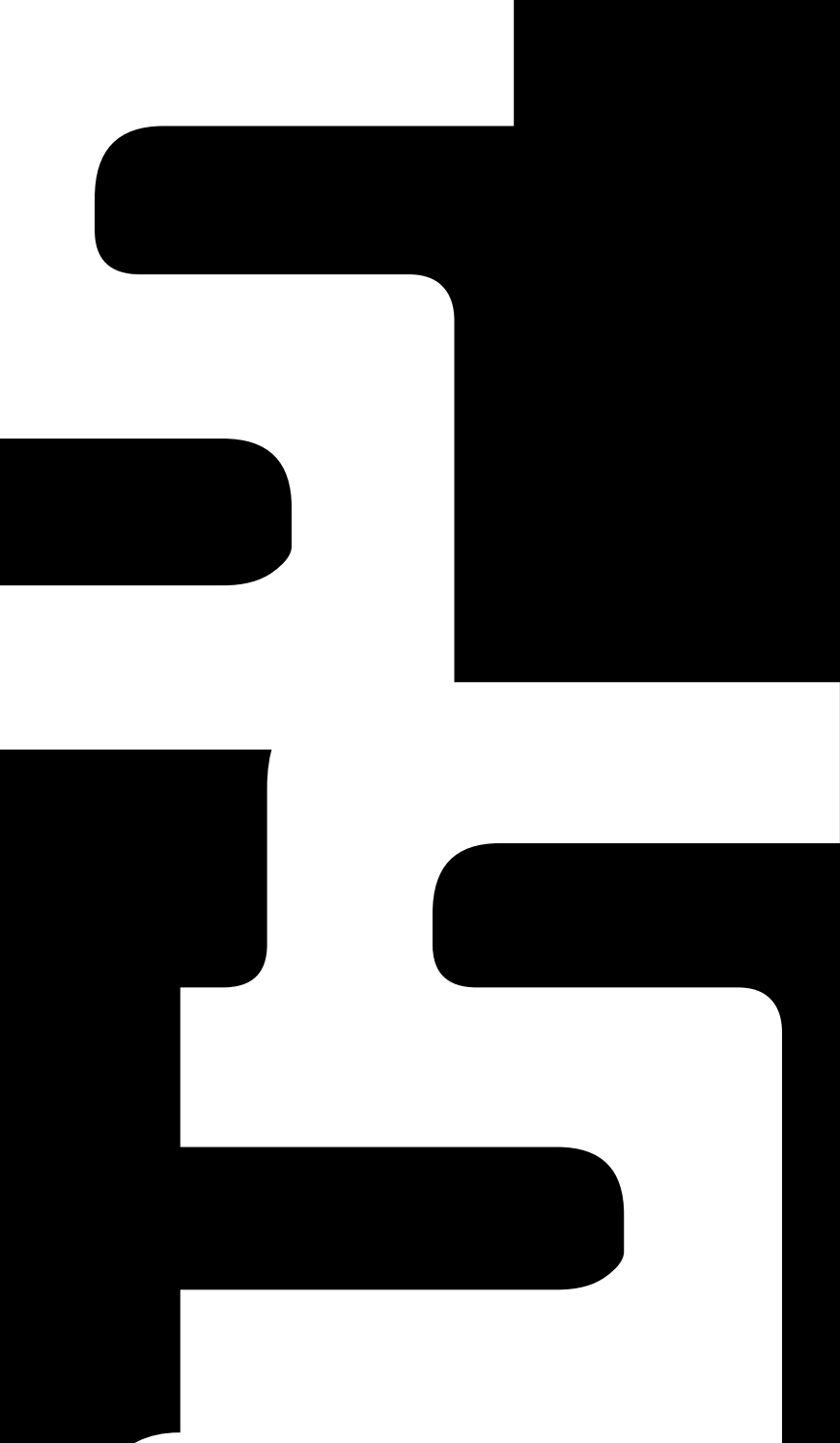
People, style: Dan
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/79**Blole Bian male figure**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

FM/80**Figure of a mother with child**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving



04

Masks and sculptures belong to secret societies and are used by them in rituals. The term “secret society” is a tracing from the French *société secrète*. The proper names have various meanings: Ngil means “gorilla”, Ekpe means “leopard”, Ntomo is a kind of tree (buckthorn), Gelede — “the appeasement of the female womb” or are of obscure etymology. The societies are considered secret not because the members hide their affiliation, but rather because they keep from uninitiated the knowledge of magical procedures and a language intelligible only to those who belong to these groups. To this day these organisations play a major role in the lives of many African peoples, rivalling local rulers in their power. They are responsible for parenting, caring for the elderly, burial and remembrance of the ancestors, they lead initiations, have judicial authority and sometimes exercise totalitarian control over societies. Their area of influence even spreads over ethnic and even national borders. The powerful Poro secret society and its female counterpart — Sande — function under different titles in Sierra Leone, Liberia and western Côte d’Ivoire.

Secret societies have strict structure and hierarchy. Their members, in accordance with age, experience, and level of initiation, perform strictly regulated duties, related to the making and use of the masks, sculptures, and other attributes.

SS/01

Headdress mask of the Ekpe secret society

People, style: Ejagham (Ekoi)
Country: Nigeria, Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy. Casting

SS/02

Mask of the Kore secret society

People, style: Bambara
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

SS/03

Idiok mask of the Ekpo secret society

People, style: Ibibio
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal.
Carving

SS/04

Kagle mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Guere (Krahn)
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

SS/05

Mbuya (Mbangu) mask

People, style: Pende
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment, plant fiber, nails.
Carving

SS/06

Mask

People, style: Grebo (Kru)
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment, feathers. Carving

SS/07

Kasangu mask of the Mugongo secret society

People, style: Salampasu
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

SS/08

Mask for initiation rites

People, style: Bena Lulua
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

SS/09

Porpianong figure of the Poro secret society in the form of a hornbill (kalao)

People, style: Senufo
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

SS/10

Kagle mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Guere (Krahn)
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal.
Carving

SS/11

Edan staff, attribute of the Ogoni (Osugbo) secret society

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy (brass).
Casting

SS/12

Mask of the Kore secret society

People, style: Bambara
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

SS/13

Mask of the Ntomo children's society

People, style: Bambara
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, cowrie shells, beads. Carving

SS/14

Mabu helmet mask of the Kwifon secret society

People, style: Wum (Grassland Kingdoms)
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

SS/15

Kagle mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Dan
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, plant fiber.
Carving

SS/16

Zaouli mask

People, style: Guro
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

SS/17

Kagle mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Dan / Guere
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

SS/18

Pipibuze mask of the Bwete secret society

People, style: Kwele
Country: Gabon, Republic of Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment. Carving

SS/19

Ge-na (Gela) mask of the Chu-den-zo secret society

People, style: Bassa
Country: Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

SS/20

Kifwebe mask of the Bwadi Bwa Kifwebe secret society

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/21

Soweï helmet mask of the Sande (Bundu) female secret society

People, style: Mende / Gola
Country: Sierra Leone, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

SS/22

Deangle mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Dan
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal, shells,
beads, textile. Carving

SS/23

Agbogho mmuo (maiden spirit) mask of the Mmanwu secret society

People, style: Igbo
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/24

Headdress mask of the Ekpe secret society

People, style: Ejagham (Ekoi)
Country: Nigeria, Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, leather, plant fiber.
Carving

SS/25

Edan staff, attribute of the Ogboni (Osugbo) secret society

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy (brass). Casting

SS/26

Elu mask with a movable jaw of the Aminikpo secret society

People, style: Ogoni
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

SS/27

Anoman (Lomane) mask of the Je secret society

People, style: Yaure
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

SS/28

Mabu helmet mask of the Kwifon secret society

People, style: Wum (Grassland Kingdoms)
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

SS/29

Ngabo shield with an image of a Kifwebe mask of the Bwadi Bwa Kifwebe society

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/30

Ape headdress mask of the Babo secret society

People, style: Mumuye
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/31

Mask in the form of the solar disk

People, style: Bwa (Bobo-Oule)
Country: Burkina Faso
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/32

Mblo mask

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

SS/33

Helmet mask of the Gelede secret society

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/34

Gunye ge mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Dan
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, plant fiber,
cowrie shells. Carving

SS/35

Guandusu figure of a mother with child of the Guan secret society

People, style: Bambara
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, beads. Carving

SS/36**Mask of the Ngil secret society**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/37**Okuyi mask of the Okuyi (Mukudji) secret society**

People, style: Punu
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/38**Kifwebe mask of the Bwadi Bwa Kifwebe secret society**

People, style: Luba
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/39**Tee gla warrior mask of the Poro secret society**

People, style: Guere
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, metal, horn, plant fiber, beads, porcupine quills, textile. Carving

SS/40**Mwana Pwo mask**

People, style: Chokwe
 Country: DR Congo, Angola
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

SS/41**Ngontang helmet mask**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/42**Guandusu figure of a mother with child of the Guan secret society**

People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

SS/43**Okuyi mask of the Okuyi (Mukudji) secret society**

People, style: Punu
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/44**Porpianong figure of the Poro secret society in the form of a hornbill (kalao)**

People, style: Senufo
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal, textile, threads. Carving

SS/45**Kaogle mask of the Poro secret society**

People, style: Dan / Guere (Krahn)
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal, leather, plant fiber. Carving

SS/46**Janus headdress mask of the Ekpe secret society**

People, style: Ejagham (Ekoi)
 Country: Nigeria, Cameroon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, antelope leather, plant fiber. Carving

SS/47**Deble (Tugubele) female figure for the Poro secret society rituals**

People, style: Senufo
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

SS/48**Helmet mask of the Gelede secret society**

People, style: Yoruba
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/49**Kpeliye'e mask of the Poro secret society**

People, style: Senufo
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

SS/50**Mask of the Kwifon (Kuosi) secret society**

People, style: Bamileke (Grassland Kingdoms)
 Country: Cameroon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, beads. Carving

SS/51**Anoman (Lomane) mask of the Je secret society**

People, style: Yaure
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, pigment. Carving

SS/52**Kaogle mask of the Poro secret society**

People, style: Dan / Guere (Krahn)
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, leather, wool, teeth, hair, textile, metal. Carving

SS/53

Mabu mask of the Kwifon secret society

People, style: Wum (Grassland Kingdoms)
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

SS/54

Kikashi (Kifwebe Bakashi) mask of the Bwadi Bwa Kifwebe secret society

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

SS/55

Mfon mask of the Ekpo secret society

People, style: Ibibio
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

SS/56

Headdress mask of the Ekpe secret society

People, style: Ejagham (Ekoi)
Country: Nigeria, Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, antelope leather, teeth, plant fiber.
Carving

SS/57

Mask of the Ntomo children's society

People, style: Bambara
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

SS/58

Edan staff, attribute of the Ogboni (Osugbo) secret society

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy (brass).
Casting

SS/59

Kagle mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Guere (Krahn)
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment, metal, leather.
Carving

SS/60

Lipiko mask for Ingoma Ya Mapiko initiations

People, style: Makonde
Country: Mozambique, Tanzania
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

SS/61

Mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Grebo (Kru)
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment, feathers.
Carving

FD
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05

RULER —

Traditional institutions of power among the peoples of Tropical Africa have a long history. During the colonial era, the European nations kept them in the chain of command, and in the modern states of the continent their authority is no less than that of presidents, parliaments, and ministries. The structures of these institutions are complex and based on the system of checks and balances, in which the credentials of the supreme leader are restrained by councils of elders, secret societies, and other political forces. Yet the ruler himself, known as *Asantehene*, *Oba*, *Oni*, *Fon* or *Njimi*, is a supreme leader, the symbolic guarantor of his subjects' well-being, a primate before the gods and ancestors, the very soul of the people. It is a mission not everyone is granted to and one that many renounce. Hence why it is the leader, rather than the elders and the heads of secret societies, who is honoured in cults during his lifetime and after death, the one immortalised in works of art. It requires the best creative resources of the artist and sculptors, as well as the most durable and valuable materials.

During ritual masquerade mysteries among the Kuba people in DR Congo, dynastic myths with a triad of characters are played out: they are the *Mwaash Ambooy* supreme leader, his wife *Ngaady Amwaash* and rebellious brother *Bwoom*. Among the Chokwe in Angola, *Cihongo* and *Mwana Pwo* mask duo depicts a ruler and a female progenitor. Among the Bamileke, Bamum, and Tikar in the kingdoms of Cameroon, groups of masks in the form of human, buffalo, and elephant heads represent different incarnations of the ruler *Fon*.

Bronze heads and figures of the rulers *Oba* and queen mother *Iyoba* in Great Benin; carved *Lefem* figures, depicting family members of the Fon rulers in Cameroon; portrait-symbolic Ndop statues in the Kuba Empire in DR Congo all formed magnificent dynastic galleries in palaces. Brass and clay heads and figures from medieval Ilé-Ifè were also intended for royal memorial cults. With each new ruler, an image of his predecessor was created, and the number of sculptures corresponded to the number of generations in the dynasty. They were worshiped and offered gifts as the guardians of the ruling dynasty. In some cultures, they were carried out during solemn processions for public display before the subjects. The rulers were presented in all glory of their ceremonial robes, in crowns and regalia, with attributes of secular and spiritual power. Interestingly, the latter often coincide across different cultures. For example, a fly whisk made from an animal tail mounted on a handle, a staff, a sword, a horn containing magical substances, or a calabash for palm wine. A bronze sculpture of Great Benin illustrates the whole chronicle of the Oranmiyan-Eweka dynasty that ruled since the beginning of the XIII century. We see the deities of the local pantheon and their animal symbols, princes of the blood, nobles, priests, military leaders, court musicians and dwarf-jesters, Portuguese merchants and tame leopards, jewellery, ritual utensils, ceremonial weapons, and award badges. All of this, in an endless series of images and interplay of symbols, tells of the life and customs of the sacred rulers of bygone eras, and many of the depicted objects remained in Benin court ceremonial practices down to the present day.

RP/01

Head of an *Oba* ruler in a crown
People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVIII–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/02

***Bwoom* mask of the royal pantheon, depicting the ruler's brother**
People, style: Kuba (Ngeende)
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, plant fiber.
Carving

RP/03

Head of an *Ooni* ruler in a crown
People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria (Ilé-Ife city-state)
XX century (after a historical reference of XII–XV centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/04

Relief panel with an image of the heir to the *Odogbo* throne in female guise
People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/05

Figure depicting the wife of a *Fon* ruler (priestess)
People, style: Bamileke / Bangwa
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

RP/06

***Tsesa Mabu* headdress mask depicting a hippo (animalistic alter-ego of the ruler)**
People, style: Bamileke
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

RP/07

Bowstand (attribute of *Mulopwe* supreme ruler)
People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal, bead.
Carving

RP/08

***Fon* ruler figure with symbols of power**
People, style: Bamileke / Bangwa
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

RP/09

Throne of a *Mwanangana* ruler
People, style: Chokwe
Country: DR Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

RP/10

***Chibinda Ilunga* — cultural hero and a legendary ruler**
People, style: Chokwe
Country: DR Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

RP/11

Panel with an image of a ruler
People, style: Kuba (Dengese)
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
Carving

RP/12

Head of an *Ooni* ruler
People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria (Ilé-Ife city-state)
XX century (after a historical reference of XII–XV centuries)
Clay. Modeling

RP/13

Relief panel with an image of an *Oba* ruler with his retinue on the palace porch
People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/14

Head of an *Oba* ruler in a crown
People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVIII–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/15

Relief panel with an image of young men
People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/16

***Lefem* figure of a *Fon* ruler with symbols of power**
People, style: Bamileke / Bangwa
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

RP/17

Relief panel with an image of an Odogbo heir

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/18

Horsman figure

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/19

Bwom mask of the royal pantheon, depicting the ruler's brother

People, style: Kuba (Bushong)
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, beads, leather, plant fiber, cowrie shells.
Carving

RP/20

Relief panel depicting a leopard

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/21

Military commander figure

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/22

Head of an Ooni ruler

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria (Ilé-Ifè city-state)
XX century (after a historical reference of XII–XV centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/23

Relief panel depicting a horseman — founder of the ruling dynasty Oranmiyan

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/24

Staff of Mulopwe supreme ruler

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

RP/25

Ndop figure depicting a supreme ruler

People, style: Kuba (Bushong)
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

RP/26

Hand-washing vessel in the form of a leopard, Oba ruler's symbol of power

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/27

Head of an Oba ruler in a crown

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVIII century)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/28

Bwom mask of the royal pantheon, depicting the ruler's brother

People, style: Kuba (Bushong)
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, beads, leather, textile, seeds, hair, feathers.
Carving

RP/29

Head of an Ooni ruler in a crown with regalia

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria (Ilé-Ifè city-state)
XX century (after a historical reference of XIV–XV centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/30

Lefem figure of a Fon ruler with symbols of power

People, style: Bamileke
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

RP/31

Figure of a courtier

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/32

Relief panel with an image of a military commander with soldiers

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/33

Head of an Ooni ruler in a crown with regalia

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
(Ilé-Ife city-state)
XX century (after a historical reference of XIV–XV centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/34

Relief panel depicting an Oba ruler on horseback with two courtiers

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/35

Figure depicting the wife of a Fon ruler (priestess)

People, style: Bamileke / Bangwa
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

RP/36

Head of an Ooni ruler

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
(Ilé-Ife city-state)
XX century (after a historical reference of XII–XV centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/37

Figure of a Portuguese soldier with a musket

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/38

Military commander figure

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/39

Figure of a ruler (priest) with a staff (from the group of Tsoede bronze figures from the village of Tada)

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
(Ilé-Ife city-state)
XX century (after a historical reference of XII–XV centuries)
Metal alloy (bronze). Casting

RP/40

Head of an Ooni ruler

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
(Ilé-Ife city-state)
XX century (after a historical reference of XII–XV centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/41

Figure of a courtier

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/42

Figure of a warrior

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/43

Shield depicting scenes from court life

People, style: Bamum
(Grassland Kingdoms)
Country: Cameroon
XX century
Tortoise shell. Carving

RP/44

Chibinda Ilunga — cultural hero and a legendary ruler

People, style: Chokwe
Country: DR Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

RP/45

Throne of a Mwanangana ruler

People, style: Luba / Songye
Country: DR Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, plant fiber.
Carving

RP/46

Helmet mask with an image of a deity, founder of the dynasty

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
First half of the XX century
(after a historical reference of XVIII–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/47

Relief panel depicting an Oba with a fish tail in the guise of the ruler of the waters, surrounded by courtiers

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/48

Mask of a high-ranking member of the Kwifon secret society at the court of a Fon ruler

People, style: Bamileke, Bamum
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, beads, cowrie shells, seeds of fruit, plant fiber.
Carving

RP/49

Rooster — symbol of power of the queen mother *Iyoba*

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/50

Figure of a courtier

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/51

Relief panel depicting an *Oba* ruler with leopards

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/52

Staff of *Mulopwe* supreme ruler

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, copper. Carving

RP/53

Relief panel depicting an *Oba* with a fish tail in the guise of the ruler of the waters, surrounded by courtiers

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/54

***Lefem* figure of a Fon ruler with symbols of power**

People, style: Bamileke
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

RP/55

Head of the usurper *Lajuwa*

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria (Ilé-Ifè city-state)
XX century (after a historical reference of XII–XV centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/56

Altar composition with an image of a ruler and a procession of courtiers

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/57

Relief panel depicting musicians with drums

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/58

***Mwaash Ambooy* royal pantheon mask depicting the ruler**

People, style: Kuba (Bushong)
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, beads, plant fiber, cowrie shells.
Carving

RP/59

Relief panel with an image of a military commander

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/60

Throne of a *Mwanangana* ruler

People, style: Chokwe
Country: DR Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal, nails.
Carving

RP/61

Figure of a court musician

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/62

Mask of a high-ranking member of the Kwifon secret society

People, style: Bamileke, Bamum
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, beads, plant fiber.
Carving

RP/63

Head of an *Ooni* ruler in a crown

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria

(Ilé-Ife city-state)

XX century (after a historical reference of XII–XV centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/64

Figure of a ruler in ceremonial robes

People, style: Chokwe

Country: DR Congo, Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, pigment.

Carving

RP/65

Equestrian statue of the founder of Oranmiyan ruling dynasty

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/66

Composition of a ruler's procession

People, style: Grassland

Kingdoms

Country: Cameroon

XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

RP/67

Head of the queen mother *Iyoba*

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI century)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

06

WAR—

Traditional institutions of power among the peoples of Tropical Africa have a long history. During the colonial era, the European nations kept them in the chain of command, and in the modern states of the continent their authority is no less than that of presidents, parliaments, and ministries. The structures of these institutions are complex and based on the system of checks and balances, in which the credentials of the supreme leader are restrained by councils of elders, secret societies, and other political forces. Yet the ruler himself, known as *Asantehene, Oba, Oni, Fon or Njimi*, is a supreme leader, the symbolic guarantor of his subjects' well-being, a primate before the gods and ancestors, the very soul of the people. It is a mission not everyone is granted to and one that many renounce. Hence why it is the leader, rather than the elders and the heads of secret societies, who is honoured in cults during his lifetime and after death, the one immortalised in works of art. It requires the best creative resources of the artist and sculptors, as well as the most durable and valuable materials.

During ritual masquerade mysteries among the Kuba people in DR Congo, dynastic myths with a triad of characters are played out: they are the *Mwaash Ambooy* supreme leader, his wife *Ngaady Amwaash* and rebellious brother *Bwoom*. Among the Chokwe in Angola, Cihongo and Mwana Pwo mask duo depicts a ruler and a female progenitor. Among the Bamileke, Bamum, and Tikar in the kingdoms of Cameroon, groups of masks in the form of human, buffalo, and elephant heads represent different incarnations of the ruler Fon.

Bronze heads and figures of the rulers *Oba* and queen mother *Iyoba* in Great Benin; carved *Lefem* figures, depicting family members of the Fon rulers in Cameroon; portrait-symbolic Ndop statues in the Kuba Empire in DR Congo all formed magnificent dynastic galleries in palaces. Brass and clay heads and figures from medieval Ilé-Ifè were also intended for royal memorial cults. With each new ruler, an image of his predecessor was created, and the number of sculptures corresponded to the number of generations in the dynasty. They were worshiped and offered gifts as the guardians of the ruling dynasty. In some cultures, they were carried out during solemn processions for public display before the subjects. The rulers were presented in all glory of their ceremonial robes, in crowns and regalia, with attributes of secular and spiritual power. Interestingly, the latter often coincide across different cultures. For example, a fly whisk made from an animal tail mounted on a handle, a staff, a sword, a horn containing magical substances, or a calabash for palm wine. A bronze sculpture of Great Benin illustrates the whole chronicle of the Oranmiyan-Eweka dynasty that ruled since the beginning of the XIII century. We see the deities of the local pantheon and their animal symbols, princes of the blood, nobles, priests, military leaders, court musicians and dwarf-jesters, Portuguese merchants and tame leopards, jewellery, ritual utensils, ceremonial weapons, and award badges. All of this, in an endless series of images and interplay of symbols, tells of the life and customs of the sacred rulers of bygone eras, and many of the depicted objects remained in Benin court ceremonial practices down to the present day.

WH/01

Horseman

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/02

Courtier with *Eben* ceremonial sword and a manilla

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/03

Hunting slingshot with a handle in the form of a female figure

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood. Carving

WH/04

Oshe Shango staff-figure with the symbols of Shango, the deity of war and thunder

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

WH/05

Horseman

People, style: Djenné-Djenno archaeological culture
Country: Mali
XX century (after a historical reference of XII–XV centuries)
Clay. Moulding

WH/06

Horseman

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/07

Ceremonial sword

People, style: Kuba / Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Metal, wood.
Forging, carving

WH/08

Decorative saber

People, style: Ashanti
Country: Ghana
XX century
Metal, wood, nails.
Forging, carving

WH/09

Altar composition depicting warriors

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/10

Oshe Shango figure with the symbols of Shango, the deity of war and thunder

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

WH/11

Warrior

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/12

Mopamba ceremonial sword

People, style: Ngombe / Poto
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Metal, wood.
Forging, carving

WH/13

Female deity Irhevbu, patroness of archers

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/14

Ceremonial sword

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Metal, wood.
Forging, carving

WH/15

Bandeguele figure depicting a forest spirit as a warrior on horseback

People, style: Senufo
Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

WH/16

Warrior with *Eben* ceremonial sword and a trident

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/17

Ceremonial sword

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, metal, copper.
Forging, carving

WH/18

Edjo re akare figure

People, style: Urhobo
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

WH/19

Ceremonial sword

People, style: Mongo
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Metal, wood, copper.
Forging, carving

WH/20

Door bolt depicting a hunter figure with his prey

People, style: Bambara / Dogon
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Wood. Carving

WH/21

Mukinka mask of the Mongongo warrior secret society

People, style: Salampasu
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, metal, plant fiber.
Carving

WH/22

Horseman

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/23

Crest mask of the Oglinye warrior secret society

People, style: Idoma
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

WH/24

Warrior with with *Eben* ceremonial sword and a spear

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/25

Hunter with his prey Bronzes from the Lower Niger region

Country: Nigeria
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVIII centuries)
Copper alloy. Casting

WH/26

Ceremonial knife

People, style: Ngbandi
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Metal, wood.
Forging

WH/27

Warrior

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/28

Relief panel with an image of warriors

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/29

Warrior with a spear and a shield

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/30

Warrior

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/31

Warrior

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/32

Ancestor figure with military attributes

People, style: Luba / Hemba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

WH/33

Ceremonial vessel with an image of warriors

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/34

Mask of the Gelede society with an image of a horseman

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

WH/35

Oshe Shango staff-figure with the symbols of Shango, the deity of war and thunder

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

WH/36

Portuguese warrior with a musket

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/37

Warrior with *Eben* ceremonial sword

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/38

Mukinka mask of the Mongongo warrior secret society

People, style: Salampasu
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, plant fiber.
Carving

WH/39

Pendant with an image of Portuguese soldiers and a leopard

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/40

Military commander on horseback

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/41

Relief panel with an image of warriors

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/42

Ceremonial knife

Country: DR Congo (?)
XX century
Metal, wood.
Forging, carving

WH/43

Vessel depicting leopard hunting

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/44

Nkisi magic figure

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal, nails, textile, leather. Carving

WH/45

Ilwoon ceremonial sword

People, style: Kuba (Bushong)
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Metal, wood.
Forging, carving

WH/46

Kasangu mask of the Mungongo secret society

People, style: Salampasu
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment, plant fiber, nails. Carving

WH/47

Lefem figure of a *Fon* ruler

People, style: Bamileke, Bangwa
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

WH/48

Military commander

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/49

Warrior

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/50

Participant of procession

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/51

Warrior on a horseback

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/52

Oshe Shango staff-figure with the symbols of Shango, the deity of war and thunder

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

WH/53

Figure with a spear and *Eben* ceremonial sword

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

WH/54

Ngulu ceremonial sword

People, style: Ngala, Ngombe
Country: DR Congo, Republic of Congo
First half of the XX century
Metal, wood. Forging, carving

**AD
07**

ANIMALS—

African animal tales take us into the world of the forest, where beasts lead the same lifestyle as humans. Animals endowed with human personalities gather in council beneath the Tree of Ancestors, raise cattle, and cultivate fields. In myths, animals appear as participants in the creation of the world and as intermediaries between gods and humans, or as culture heroes who taught people hunting, agriculture, and magic. Such are the *Kalao* hornbill among the Senufo of Côte d'Ivoire and the *Chiwara* antelope among the Bambara of Mali, whose images often appear in the ritual art of these peoples.

In African cultures, humans are often compared to animals, and clans are associated with totemic beasts. Powers-that-be are likened to formidable predators. In Great Benin, the laudatory epithet "leopard of the palace" became a title of ruler and is reflected in art and heraldic symbolism. Vessels and award badges in the form of leopard heads, leopard figures on relief panels, the spotted patterns of skins in the attire of courtiers, and necklaces of leopard fangs worn by military commanders — the sacred animal appears in hundreds of works. In Benin bronze sculpture, one also encounters images of horses, rams, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians. None of them are accidental; all are filled with deep meaning.

Each people has a recognizable "animal style" and its own set of characters. The abstract flat buffalo mask of the Baule in Côte d'Ivoire is nothing like the realistic three-dimensional buffalo mask of the Bamileke in Cameroon or the anatomically accurate buffalo mask of the Bidjogo in Guinea-Bissau. In some regions, only two or three animals of particular cultural importance are selectively depicted; in others, the entire local fauna inhabiting both land and water is portrayed.

Thanks to the skill and experience of the sculptors, depictions of animals are highly convincing, and one can easily recognize the creature represented. Yet the image is often assembled from different details and incorporates features of several animals. A mask can have the forehead of a bull, the horns and ears of an antelope, the jaws of a crocodile, the tusks of a boar, while in profile a human nose becomes visible and a chameleon figurine, rising from the crown of the head. After all, the mask is a chthonic monster, unlike any living creature. The task of the master is to embody within it a supernatural entity whose appearance will strike evil spirits to tremble and leave no doubt in encountering a being from another dimension of life. In the adornment and decoration of masks and sculptures, animal materials are used: feathers and beaks of birds, horns, tusks/fangs, fur, pelts, crocodile and snake skin. Only with these does the object attain a complete form and absorb the vital force of animals, whose particles have quite literally become part of its substance.

AP/01

Bandeguele figure with two riders on horseback

People, style: Senufo

Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Wood. Carving

AP/02

Leopard head

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/03

Ceremonial bell in the form of a horse head

People, style: Yoruba (Idjebu)

Country: Nigeria

XX century (after a historical reference of XVII–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/04

Gbekre figure in the form of a baboon

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, textile. Carving

AP/05

Porpianong figure in the form of a hornbill (*kalao*)

People, style: Senufo

Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

AP/06

Bolt in the form of a lizard

People, style: Dogon

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, metal. Carving

AP/07

Figure of a man on horseback

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/08

Altar sculpture in the form of a rooster

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

A rooster is the symbol of fruitfulness and fertility. Its images were put on an altar, dedicated to *Iyoba*, mother of the *Oba* ruler

AP/09

Ceremonial vessel with handles in the shape of two-headed snakes

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/10

Ram altar sculpture

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/11

Relief panel depicting an *Oba* ruler on horseback with his retinue

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/12

Door with images of crocodiles and lizards

People, style: Dogon

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, metal. Carving

AP/13

Door with an image of a *Bo Nun Amuin* buffalo mask

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, metal, pigment.

Carving

AP/14

Soko Mutu (so'o) mask depicting a monkey

People, style: Hembra

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood. Carving

AP/15

Porpianong figure in the form of a hornbill (*kalao*)

People, style: Senufo

Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment, metal, textile,

cowrie shells, feathers, nails.

Carving, forging

AP/16

***Nkisi Nkondi* magic figure with a tortoise-shaped base**

People, style: Kongo (Vili)

Country: DR Congo,

Republic of Congo,

Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, glass, plant fiber,

textile, feathers, leather.

Carving

AP/17

Nkisi Nkondi Kozo magic figure in the form of a two-headed dog

People, style: Kongo (Vili)

Country: DR Congo, Republic of Congo, Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, pigment, glass, nails. Carving

AP/18

Nasolo zoomorphic headdress

People, style: Senufo

Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Wood. Carving

The depicted animal combines features of an antelope, a boar, and a crocodile. Between the horns is a finial figure in the form of a chameleon.

AP/19

Kpeliye'e mask of the Poro secret society, with horns and an image of *kalao* bird

People, style: Senufo

Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

Kalao hornbill is a symbol of fertility, and ram horns are associated with sacrifice

AP/20

Altar sculpture with an image of courtiers with sistrums and idiophones in the form of birds

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Wood, metal. Carving

The characters are holding ceremonial musical instruments — sistrums and idiophone-staffs in the form of an *Ahiamwen-oro* “bird of prophecy”

AP/21

Granary door depicting ancestors and *Dyommo* rabbit masks

People, style: Dogon

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, metal. Carving

Dyommo rabbit is a folklore character included in performances with masks. Rabbit is an animal eating crops, and an object of hunting

AP/22

Python head, decorative element of the roof of a palace

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/23

***Sua bor* crest mask with features of a hyena, an antelope, a crocodile and a bird**

People, style: Mambila

Country: Nigeria, Cameroon

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

AP/24

***Wan Pesego* zoomorphic headdress with bird- and antelope features**

People, style: Mossi

Country: Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

AP/25

Decorative vessel with images of a mouse and lizards

People, style: Ashanti

Country: Ghana

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/26

Relief panel (pendant) depicting an *Oba* ruler and crocodiles

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/27

Relief panel with an image of a crocodile and a fish

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

A crocodile is a symbol of *Olokun* see deity, it represents the power of an *Oba* ruler over the water element

AP/28

***Lomane* mask with a finial in the form of a bird**

People, style: Guro / Yaure

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

A bird is a symbol of connection between the world of people and the world of ancestors

AP/29

Ceremonial vessel in the form of a leopard

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

A leopard is a symbol of the *Oba* ruler's strength and greatness, it is often pictured on Benin's regalia. Leopards were called “the *Oba* of the woods”, and rulers — “the leopard of the palace”

AP/30

Idiophone (clapper) with a finial in the form of a bird

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

On the ceremonial musical instrument is an *Ahiamwen-oro*, “bird of prophecy”. Researchers suggest the bird may represent a vulture, a kingfisher, or a thrush-like redstart. There is no consensus as to which particular species of bird is depicted on the staff

AP/31

Figure of a leopard lying down

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/32

Leopard

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

A leopard is a symbol of the Oba ruler’s strength and greatness, it is often pictured on Benin’s regalia. Leopards were called “the Oba of the woods”, and rulers — “the leopard of the palace”

AP/33

Chiwara crest mask in the form of an antelope

People, style: Bambara

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, metal, textile, nails.

Carving

AP/34

Kpeliye’e mask with ram horns and a finial in the form of an animalistic figurine

People, style: Senufo

Country: Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/35

Ceremonial hand-washing vessel with images of rams

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

A ram is a symbol of masculinity, endurance, and perseverance

AP/36

Relief panel with bird-shaped idiophones

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

The characters are holding ceremonial musical instruments — sistrums and idiophone-staffs in the form of an *Ahiamwen-oro* “bird of prophecy”

AP/37

Yehoti butterfly mask

People, style: Bwa

Country: Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

AP/38

Horseman

People, style: Dogon / Tellem

Country: Mali

XX century

Clay. Moulding

A horse is a symbol of prestige, since only a rich high-status person could afford their own one. For this reason, a sculptural image of a horseman had the best magical potential and could serve as an object of power. The rider’s prayerful pose and gesture are associated with rituals of rainmaking.

AP/39

Leopard head

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/40

Kplekple mask, a stylized image of the solar disc with bull horns

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d’Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

AP/41

Mask of the Gelede society in the form of a female head with a bird finial

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

AP/42

Wan Noraogo rooster headdress

People, style: Mossi

Country: Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

AP/43

Image of a man on horseback

People, style: Djenné-Djenno archaeological culture

Country: Mali

XX century (after a historical reference of VIII–XVI centuries)

Clay. Moulding

A horse is a symbol of prestige, since only a rich high-status person could afford their own one. For this reason, a sculptural image of a horseman had the best magical potential and could serve as an object of power.

AP/44

Mwaash Ambooy helmet mask

People, style: Kuba

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, plant fiber, textile, beads, cowrie shells.

Carving

The ledge on the crown is a stylized representation of an elephant's trunk

AP/45

Buffalo mask

People, style: Bamileke

Country: Cameroon

First half of the XX century

Wood, copper, leather, plant fiber, beads, cowrie shells.

Carving

AP/46

Chiwara headdress with antelope and aardvark features

People, style: Bambara

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

AP/47

Relief panel of a courtier with leopards

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

A leopard is a symbol of the *Oba* ruler's strength and greatness, it is often pictured on Benin's regalia. Leopards were called "the Oba of the woods", and rulers — "the leopard of the palace". The gesture of the character holding the leopards by their tails signifies the *Oba*'s right to sacrifice these predators and his absolute power over society and the natural world

AP/48

Pipibuze zoo-anthropomorphic mask of the Bwete society

People, style: Kwele

Country: Gabon, Republic of Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

Heart-shaped framing

of the mask is a stylized

representation of antelope

(ram) horns

AP/49

Opou Ifa divination tray with images of lizards and fish

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood. Carving

AP/50

Kifwebe owl mask

People, style: Luba

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

An owl was associated with magical powers

AP/51

Sorsorne headdress with a female figure, fish and snakes

People, style: Baga

Country: Guinea

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

AP/52

Buffalo mask

People, style: Bamileke

Country: Cameroon

First half of the XX century

Wood, textile, beads, cowrie shells.

Carving

A buffalo symbolizes strength

and fertility and is a heraldic

animal of traditional rulers

AP/53

Chiwara headdress in the form of an antelope with its calf on the back

People, style: Bambara

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

AP/54

Opou Igede vessel for divination items, with images of animals

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

AP/55

Door with images of lizards (crocodiles), birds and a tortoise

People, style: Dogon

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood. Carving

AP/56

Chiwara crest mask with antelope features

People, style: Bambara

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood. Carving

AP/57

“Mouse oracle” — Gbekre divination vessel with an image of a scorpion

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d’Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

AP/58

Ceremonial vessel depicting courtiers, a snail, a tortoise, and snakes

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

A snail and a tortoise are sacrificial animals. They appear together in proverbs: “The tortoise is the snail’s friend — shell to shell they remain together”. According to a legend, the territory of Great Benin emerged from the sand poured out from a snail’s shell

AP/59

Bird staff finial

People, style: Senufo

Country: Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Wood. Carving

AP/60

Ceremonial vessel with images of roosters, frogs, snakes and leopards

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

AP/61

Ruler figure with a leopard face waist mask

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

A leopard is a symbol of the *Oba* ruler’s strength and greatness, it is often pictured on Benin’s regalia. A miniature waist mask in the form of a leopard head made of brass or ivory served as a sort of honorary insignia and was worn like a buckle fastening the edges of a garment

AP/62

Kuduo vessel with images of leopards and a ram

People, style: Ashanti

Country: Ghana

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

Kuduo are vessels for storing gold dust, ritual objects, and valuables. Regarded as containers not only of material wealth but also of the owner’s vital force, they could be used in funerary rites. The scene of leopards attacking a ram, depicted on the lid, is a marker of the owner’s high status and an allegory of the superiority of the strong over the weak

AP/63

Buffalo mask

People, style: Bobo / Mossi

Country: Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, metal.

Carving

AP/64

Gbekre figure

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d’Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

AP/65

Kilume male mask of the Bwadi Bwa Kifwebe society

People, style: Songye

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving
The coloring of the mask imitates the stripes of an okapi antelope or zebra skin. The sharply protruding facial forms are associated with totemic animals, such as lions, crocodiles, and porcupines.

FD
R
08

PRESTIGE —

Prestige and status are demonstrated through various outward signs. By the incisions and scars on the face and body, one could tell who belongs and who is an outsider. Jewellery and special amulets indicate the initiated members of a secret society. When seeing on the head of a medieval bronze statue the same crown that is worn today by a local ruler, one would conclude that the statue depicts a king, and the form of this crown has been preserved over centuries.

African art is more often focused on status, rather than the individual. The ancestor depicted in sculpture is not just a distant relative of several generations, but a status not every deceased deserves to achieve. Attributes and objects of low status are not represented in the works of sculptors.

In pre-colonial kingdoms with centralized power, traditions and styles of court art were formed in which, aside from ritual objects, luxury goods for palace life were also created. Special aesthetic demands were made to these objects, and their exquisite beauty served to glorify the ruler and reinforce his prestige. Richly decorated carved goblets for palm wine in the form of human heads, openwork vessels for storing valuables, stools, and headrests with graceful female figures were created exclusively for rulers and nobility, and their artistic quality corresponded to the exalted status of their patrons and owners. Exotic foreign curiosities brought by Europeans from the time of the earliest contacts with the peoples of Africa in the late XV century also became prestige objects. Such rarities came into the possession of leaders and rulers, while court sculptors adopted their forms and created works inspired by them, as in the case of the carved high-backed thrones of the Chokwe in Angola, which remotely resemble Baroque armchairs.

The hierarchy of status is vividly reflected in Benin sculpture. In altar compositions and relief panels, the figure of the oba ruler is always larger than those of the servants. The ruler and his close retinue are represented with attributes of power and in ceremonial regalia. The bronzes of Great Benin present a detailed encyclopaedia of court life and of the status symbolism related to every rank and grade. The choice of materials was strictly regulated. Only the ruler possessed carved ivory tusks and objects made of costly brass and bronze, crafted in the labour-intensive lost-wax technique by the guild of court casters. These materials were considered everlasting and the most worthy of immortalizing the glory of the Benin dynasty and emphasizing its power and wealth.

PS/01**Smoking pipe**

People, style: Bamum, Babungo

Country: Cameroon

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/02**Relief panel depicting leopard hunt**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/03**Mbwoongntey goblet for palm wine**

People, style: Kuba (Bushong)

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

PS/04**Stool with an image of a sanza player**

People, style: Chokwe

Country: DR Congo, Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

PS/05**Mbwoongntey goblet for palm wine**

People, style: Kuba (Bushong)

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

PS/06**Smoking pipe**

People, style: Bamum, Babungo

Country: Cameroon

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/07**Stool**

People, style: Songye

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

PS/08**Mbwoongntey goblet for palm wine**

People, style: Kuba (Bushong)

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

PS/09**Ceremonial vessel**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/10**Relief panel depicting a military commander, warriors, servants and a musician**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/11**Headrest with two figures**

People, style: Luba

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

PS/12**Courtier with *Eben* ceremonial sword and *Ekure* bell**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/13**Ceremonial horn with an image of a female half figure**

People, style: Bena Lulua

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

PS/14**Relief panel depicting young men**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/15**Ceremonial staff**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/16**Vessel depicting leopard hunt and two kneeling figures**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/17**Court dwarf figure**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of the XV century)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/18

Relief panel depicting a musician with drums

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/19

Throne

People, style: Hehe, Luguru
Country: Tanzania
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal, beads.
Carving

PS/20

Ram figure

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XV–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/21

Ilé-Ifè messenger

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XV century)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting
Cross pendant symbolizes the successive connection between the Benin dynasty and Ilé-Ifè

PS/22

Smoking pipe

People, style: Bamum, Bamileke
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy (brass?), wood.
Casting, carving

PS/23

Court dwarf figure

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of the XV century)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/24

Relief panel depicting a Portuguese

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/25

Colon figure depicting a European

People, style: Azande
Country: Mozambique, Tanzania
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

PS/26

Oba ruler with tame leopards and squires

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVII–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/27

Domu, a string instrument with the neck in the form of a human figure

People, style: Azande
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, leather. Carving

PS/28

Court musician playing horn

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVII–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/29

Ilé-Ifè messenger

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of the XV century)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

Cross pendant symbolizes the successive connection between the Benin dynasty and Ilé-Ifè and recognition of the legitimacy of the new Oba ruler

PS/30

Leopard-shaped vessel

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/31

Leopard figure

People, style: Fon (Kingdom of Dahomey)
Country: Benin
XX century (after a historical reference of the XIX century)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/32

Vessel with a finial in the form of a human figure

People, style: Mambila
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Clay. Moulding

PS/33

Vessel in the form of a human figure

People, style: Luba / Hemba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

PS/34**Smoking pipe**

People, style: Bamum, Bamileke

Country: Cameroon

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/35**Altar composition depicting an Oba ruler with leopards**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVIII–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/36**Figure of a courtier**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVIII–XIX centuries)

Clay. Moulding

PS/37**Relief panel depicting a servant and a courtier with *Ekpoki* jewelry box**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/38**Vessel with a finial in the form of a human figure**

People, style: Mangbetu

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Clay. Moulding

PS/39**Relief panel depicting an Oba ruler with an *Edaiken* heir**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/40**Waist mascaron in the form of a leopard head**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/41**Vessel with human figures**

People, style: Luba

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

PS/42**Vessel in the form of a female figure**

People, style: Mangbetu

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Clay. Moulding

PS/43**Court dwarf figure**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of the XV century)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/44**Headrest**

People, style: Luba

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

PS/45**Colon figure depicting a European**

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

PS/46**Equestrian statue of the founder of Oranmiyan ruling dynasty**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/47**Relief panel depicting musicians**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/48**Image of a courtier with a welcoming gesture**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XVIII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/49**Ceremonial vessel**

People, style: Dogon

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/50**Waist pendant in the form of a ram head**

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVII–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/51

Kiteya vessel with images of human figures and lizards

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

PS/52

Staff

People, style: Igbo (?)
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

PS/53

Stool

People, style: Hemba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

PS/54

Vessel with a finial in the form of a female figure

People, style: Mangbetu
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Clay. Moulding

PS/55

Nanga string instrument in the form of a human figure

People, style: Azande / Mangbetu
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, leather. Carving

PS/56

String instrument in the form of a human figure

People, style: Mangbetu
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, metal, snake skin.
Carving

PS/57

Stool

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

PS/58

Architectural element of a palace in the form of a python head

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVII–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/59

Ceremonial vessel

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVII–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/60

Ceremonial vessel

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVII–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/61

Court musician playing horn

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVII–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/62

Figure of a courtier

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVII–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/63

Jewellery box

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, plant fiber.
Carving

PS/64

Figure of a courtier with a staff

People, style: Yoruba (group of bronze figures from the village of Tada)
Country: Nigeria
XX century (after a historical reference of XIV–XVI centuries)
Metal alloy (bronze). Casting

PS/65

Jewellery box with an image of a woman laying down

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, plant fiber.
Carving

PS/66

Oba ruler head

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of the XVI century)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/67

Vessel in the form of a leopard

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVI–XIX centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/68

Vessel

People, style: Bariba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Clay, pigment. Moulding

PS/69

Kuduo vessel for storing gold dust

People, style: Ashanti
Country: Ghana
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/70

Headrest

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

PS/71

Headrest

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

PS/72

Court dwarf figure

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of the XV century)
Clay. Moulding

PS/73

Ceremonial vessel with an image of a horseman

People, style: Dogon
Country: Mali
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/74

Stool

People, style: Hemba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

PS/75

Court musician playing horn

People, style: Edo (Bini)
Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
XX century (after a historical reference of XVII–XVIII centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/76

Ceremonial vessel

People, style: Ashanti
Country: Ghana
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/77

Ceremonial bell in the form of a head

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
XX century (after a historical reference of the XIX century)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

PS/78

Stool

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

An abstract graphic design featuring a complex, interlocking pattern of black and white geometric shapes. The shapes are primarily rectangular and L-shaped, with rounded corners, creating a sense of depth and movement. The pattern is set against a solid black background.

09

EARTH —

Masks and round sculpture are common primarily among the societies of sedentary farmers that predominate in Tropical Africa. They are used at important stages of the agricultural cycle, linking rituals and celebrations with agricultural works and the changing of seasons. The same forces of fertility are in charge of both the gifts of the earth and the continuation of the lineage, and each culture interprets and embodies these forces in its own way through works of art.

Mask rituals go along with the periods of sowing and harvest. Among the Bambara in Mali, these mysteries are led by the mythological hero Chiwara, who taught people to cultivate the land. The crest masks of the Chiwara secret society represent fantastical creatures combining features of antelopes, antbears, and other animals, or appear as a paired set of antelope masks. The male's sharply curved mane with its jagged edge symbolizes the sun and masculinity, while the female, carrying a cub on her back, embodies the life-giving forces of the earth and femininity. In the dance of the masks, the interaction of sky and earth — the masculine and feminine principles — is played out, which suggestively triggers the processes of conception and growth in nature and among all living beings that inhabit it. These same characters appear in the fields in the midst of agricultural labour, inspiring the workers. Among the Baga in Guinea, this sphere is associated with the gigantic *D'mba* mask in the form of a female half-figure. It represents neither an ancestor nor a deity, but rather an abstract idea of femininity, an archetypal image of a mother. Touching its breasts during the dance bestows blessings of conception, childbirth, and happy motherhood.

The harvest festival marks the end of the agrarian cycle and a joyful period of rest after long months of labor and malnutrition, when celebrations and entertainment activities are held, including theatrical performances featuring masks and marionettes.

Fertility is the supreme value and a central theme in African art. Revered ancestors are interested above all in the continuation of their lineage. Depicted as ideally beautiful men and women in the prime of their lives, in childbearing age, they encourage and inspire new births by their appearance. Majestic female figures in frozen hieratic poses occur in the practices of secret women's societies responsible for interaction with the forces of fertility and for combating infertility. Similar to this visual archetype are the fertility dolls common in many cultures, they are personal female talismans designed to ensure healthy and numerous offspring.

EF /01**Female figure**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /02***Phemba* — figure of a mother with children**

People, style: Kongo (Yombe)
 Country: DR Congo, Republic of Congo, Angola
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /03***Akuaba* fertility doll**

People, style: Ashanti
 Country: Ghana
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /04**Figure of a mother with child**

People, style: Luba (?)
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /05***Dyoneni* fertility figure**

People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /06***Chiwara* crest mask for agricultural rites**

People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /07**Female figure**

People, style: Akan (Atye, Anyi)
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /08**Figure of a mother with children**

People, style: Luba
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /09***Ikpobi* mask**

People, style: Idoma
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

EF /10***Chiwara* crest mask for agricultural rites**

People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /11**Fertility figure**

People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /12**Female figure with pestle and mortar**

People, style: Dogon
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood. Carving

EF /13***Chiwara* crest mask for agricultural rites**

People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /14**Figure of a mother with child**

People, style: Yaka
 Country: DR Congo, Angola
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /15**Male figure**

People, style: Yoruba (group of Tsoede bronze sculptures from the village of Tada)
 Country: Nigeria
 XX century (after a historical reference of XIII–XVI centuries)
 Metal alloy. Casting

The sculpture, executed in the style of the medieval memorial figures of the rulers of Ilé-Ifè, was discovered by the British archaeologist B. Fagg in the village of Tada on the bank of the Niger River, where locals used it in fertility rites to increase the productivity of the land, improve fish catches and fertility of women.

EF /16***Ikpobi* mask**

People, style: Idoma
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

EF /17***Dyoneni* fertility figure**

People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF /18***Guandusu* figure of the Guan female secret society**

People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF/19

Head of a *Merenkun* marionette
 People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal, nails,
 plant fiber.
 Carving

EF/20

***Akuaba* fertility doll**
 People, style: Ashanti
 Country: Ghana
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, beads. Carving

EF/21

***Guandusu* figure of the Guan female secret society**
 People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF/22

***Dyoneni* fertility figure**
 People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF/23

***Dyoneni* fertility figure**
 People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF/24

Female figure
 People, style: Dan
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, textile.
 Carving

EF/25

Female figure
 People, style: Akan (Anyi)
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF/26

***Lefem* figure of a *Fon* ruler's wife with children**
 People, style: Bamileke,
 Bangwa
 Country: Cameroon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF/27

Mask depicting the solar disc
 People, style: Bwa (Bobo-Oule)
 Country: Burkina Faso
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

EF/28

***Akuaba* fertility doll**
 People, style: Akan (Ashanti)
 Country: Ghana
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, beads. Carving

EF/29

Figure with a shoulder *D'mba* mask
 People, style: Baga
 Country: Guinea
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, beads. Carving

EF/30

Figure of a mother with child
 People, style: Yaka
 Country: DR Congo, Angola
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF/31

Shoulder *D'mba* mask for agricultural rites and female initiations
 People, style: Baga
 Country: Guinea
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, plant fiber.
 Carving

EF/32

***Colon* figure of a European woman sitting on a stool in the form of a leopard**
 People, style: Ashanti
 Country: Ghana
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

EF/33

Fertility doll
 People, style: Namji
 Country: Cameroon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, textile, beads,
 leather, cowrie shells. Carving

EF/34

***Phemba* figure of a mother with children**
 People, style: Kongo (Yombe)
 Country: DR Congo, Republic of Congo, Angola
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF/35

Head of a *Merenkun* marionette
 People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal, textile,
 nails.
 Carving

EF/36

***Guandusu* figure of the Guan female secret society**
 People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

EF/37

***Chiwara* crest mask for agricultural rites**
 People, style: Bambara
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, cowrie shells.
 Carving

EF / 38

Comb in the shape of an *Akuaba* fertility doll

People, style: Ashanti

Country: Ghana

First half of the XX century

Wood. Carving

EF / 39

Female figure

People, style: Atye

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF / 40

Male figure

People, style: Yoruba (group of Tsoede bronze sculptures from the village of Tada)

Country: Nigeria

XX century (after a historical reference of XIII–XIV centuries)

Metal alloy. Casting

The sculpture, executed in the style of the medieval memorial figures of the rulers of Ilé-Ifé, was discovered by the British archaeologist B. Fagg in the village of Tada on the bank of the Niger River, where locals used it in fertility rites to increase the productivity of the land, improve fish catches and fertility of women.

EF / 41

Figure of a mother with children

People, style: Igbo / Urhobo

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment, textile. Carving

EF / 42

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF / 43

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Luba

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF / 44

Rooster — the symbol of fertility, attribute of the queen-mother

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

First half of the XX century

(after a historical reference of XVII–XVIII centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

EF / 45

***Chiwara* crest mask for agricultural rites**

People, style: Bambara

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF / 46

***Ogbom* headpiece for fertility rites in honour of Ala, the earth goddess**

People, style: Ibibio, Eket

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

EF / 47

Pair of primal ancestors

People, style: Dogon

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF / 48

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Akan (Baule)

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, beads. Carving

EF / 49

Fertility figure

People, style: Bambara

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, shell. Carving

EF / 50

***Dyoneni* fertility figure**

People, style: Bambara

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF / 51

Head of a *Merenkun* marionette

People, style: Bambara

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, metal, plant fiber, textile.

Carving

EF / 52

***Dyoneni* fertility figure**

People, style: Bambara

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF / 53

Female figure

People, style: Fang

Country: Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF / 54

Female figure

People, style: Luba / Hemba

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF / 55

***Ere Ibeji* female twin figure**

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF/56

Fertility figure

People, style: Bambara

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF/57

***Phemba* figure of a mother with child**

People, style: Kongo (Yombe)

Country: DR Congo, Republic of Congo, Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF/58

Fertility doll

People, style: Namji

Country: Cameroon

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, cowrie shells, beads, textile, metal.

Carving

EF/59

Fertility figure

People, style: Bambara

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF/60

Female figure

People, style: Akan

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF/61

Fertility figure

People, style: Bambara

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF/62

Figure of a mother with children

People, style: Yaka

Country: DR Congo, Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF/63

Figure of a mother with child

People, style: Yaka

Country: DR Congo, Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF/64

Female figure

People, style: Akan (?)

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

EF/65

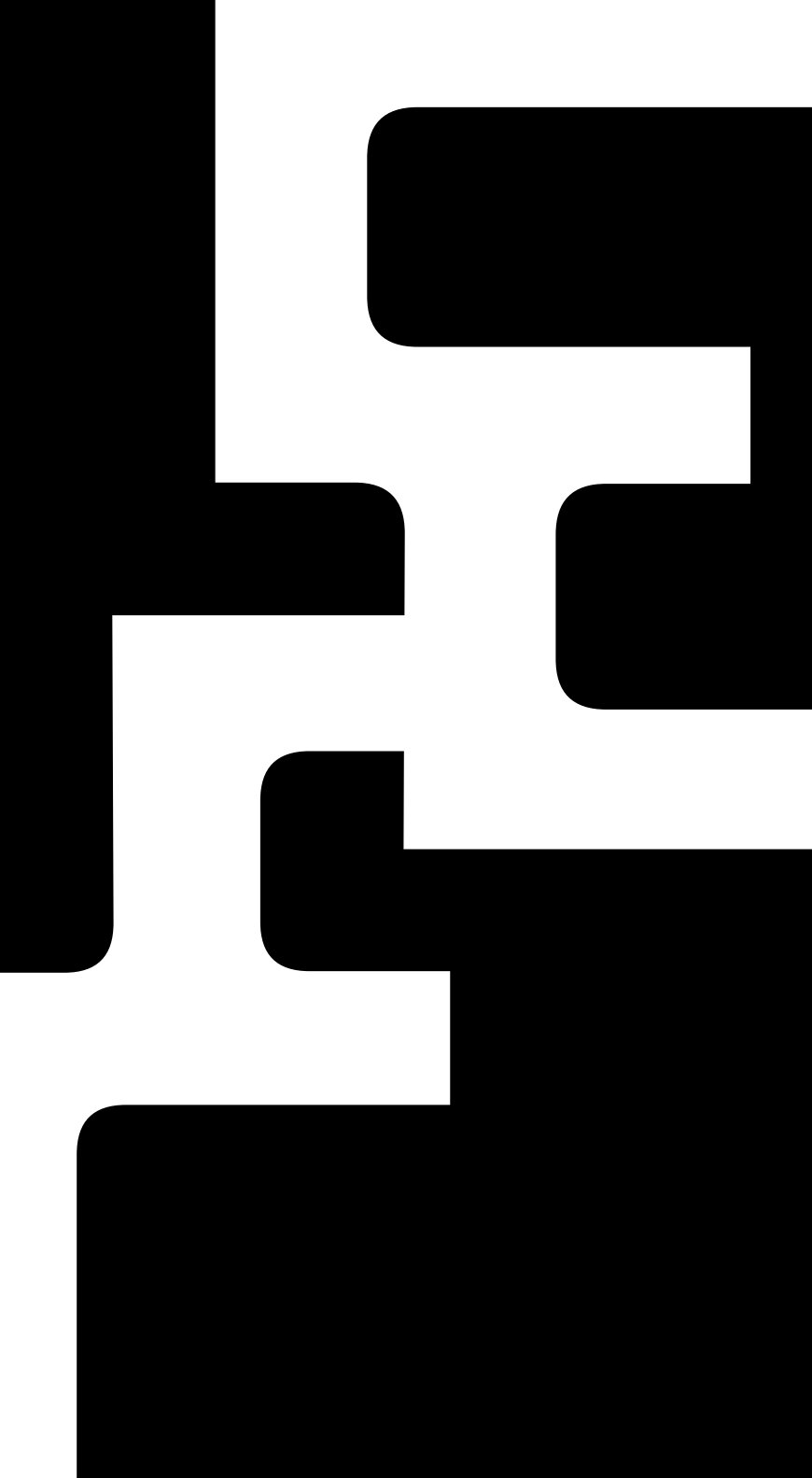
Comb in the shape of an *Akuaba* fertility doll

People, style: Ashanti

Country: Ghana

First half of the XX century

Wood. Carving



10

MAGIC—

The African continent is always associated with magic, and this stereotype carries over to African art.

Behind the outward manifestations of magic stands a powerful system of traditional knowledge, an alternative science about the universe, a rational comprehension of reality. In Africa, the knowledgeable and the wise are bowed to and honoured. “When an old man dies, a library burns” — this proverb-like statement by the famous writer Ahmadu Hampaate Baa reflects the cultural significance and power of knowledge. Magical rituals are the practical application of secret knowledge for the purposes of healing, divinating the future, and influencing events. Masks and sculptures function as instruments and devices for interaction with spirits and the forces of nature. The majority of them have ritual and magical purpose. If a female figure stands in a field as a scarecrow, it serves as a protective amulet, driving away not only animals and thieves but, above all, evil spirits. Magical rituals transform reality, and participation in them alters the appearance of the objects themselves. The thick sacrificial crust formed by repeated offerings on the *Gbekre* baboon statues of the Baule in Côte d’Ivoire, the armour of iron nails on the bodies of the *Nkisi Nkondi* fetishes in Congo, and the oily, myrrh streaming patina of the *Bieri* figures of the Fang in Gabon all prove them to be deeply consecrated objects. Even the objects, appearing to us as utilitarian, can be of magical nature. Carved doors and locks were commissioned from masters of ritual sculpture and served as guardians and protective amulets, as well as participated in rites of consecration and ritual feeding.

Part of sacred knowledge is the ability to determine the future through complex techniques of divination. The *Ifa* system of prophecy among the Yoruba in Nigeria has been included in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. This divinatory system uses palm nuts on special *Opon Ifa* boards depicting Eshu — the mediator deity between worlds — includes 256 symbolic combinations. Only an experienced diviner is capable of interpreting their configurations. During the ritual, the exquisitely carved *Opon ifa* divination board becomes a symbolic model of the universe in which a person’s fate is determined. Divinatory items among different peoples are always expertly crafted and imbued with symbolism. Boards for the ancient logical game of *Mancala*, popular in Africa, were originally used for divination and numerical calculations. The process of moving seeds across the board imitates agrarian and life cycles. When artificial intelligence specialists studied the possibilities of this African game, it turned out that there are 889 billion possible arrangements of seeds on the playing board. Performing these calculations required the use of 144 mega processors operating continuously for 51 hours.

MK/01

Female figure with pestle and mortar

People, style: Akan (Baule)

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/02

Game board

People, style: Luba (?)

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/03

Magic figure

People, style: Yaka

Country: DR Congo, Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/04

Opon Ifa tray for the Ifa divination

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood. Carving

MK/05

Gbekre baboon figure

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/06

Bell for summoning spirits

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

MK/07

Phemba figure with child

People, style: Kongo, Yombe

Country: Republic of Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, textile. Carving

MK/08

Female figure

People, style: Atye

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, beads, metal.

Carving

MK/09

Gbekre se divination vessel ("mouse oracle")

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, plant fiber.

Carving

MK/10

Magic figure

People, style: Chamba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/11

Butti magic figure

People, style: Teke

Country: DR Congo, Republic of

Congo, Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, plant fiber, claw,

feathers, textile, seeds.

Carving

MK/12

Phemba figure

People, style: Kongo (Yombe)

Country: DR Congo, Republic of

Congo, Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/13

Gbekre baboon figure

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, textile. Carving

MK/14

Nkisi magic figure

People, style: Songye

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, metal, leather, plant

fiber, horn, feathers, seeds,

beads.

Carving

MK/15

Bell for summoning spirits

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

MK/16

Female figure

People, style: Atye

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment, patina, nails.

Carving

MK/17

Iagalagana magic figure

People, style: Mumuye

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/18

Bell for summoning spirits

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

MK/19

Figure of Asye Usu forest spirit

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/20

Magic figure

People, style: Chamba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/21

Animal figure

People, style: Luba

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/22

Gbekre se divination vessel ("mouse oracle")

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/23

Nkisi magic figure

People, style: Songye / Kusu

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, textile, horn, plant fiber,
nails.

Carving

MK/24

Nkisi Nkondi figure

People, style: Kongo (Vili)

Country: Republic of Congo,
Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, metal, glass,
textile. Carving

MK/25

Figure of Asye Usu forest spirit

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/26

Hanging box for storing amulets and magical potions

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical
reference of XVIII–XIX
centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?), beads,
cowrie shells.

Casting

MK/27

Phemba figure

People, style: Kongo (Yombe)

Country: DR Congo, Republic of
Congo,
Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/28

Bateba figure

People, style: Lobi

Country: Burkina Faso

XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/29

Figure of Asye Usu forest spirit

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, plant fiber.

Carving

MK/30

Phemba figure with child

People, style: Kongo (Yombe)

Country: DR Congo, Republic of
Congo,
Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, glass.

Carving

MK/31

Female figure

People, style: Anyi

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, beads. Carving

MK/32

Deguele helmet mask with a finial in the form of a female figure

People, style: Senufo

Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali,
Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/33

Nkisi magic figure

People, style: Songye

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Wood, metal, feathers, textile,
plant fiber, cowrie shells, hide.

Carving

MK/34

Magic figure

People, style: Mambila

Country: Nigeria, Cameroon

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, metal.

Carving

MK/35

Figure of Asye Usu forest spirit

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/36

Figure with an offering bowl

People, style: Bena Lulua

Country: DR Congo

First half of the XX century

Bone. Carving

MK/37

Iagalagana magic figure

People, style: Mumuye

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK /38

***Nkisi Nkondi* figure**

People, style: Kongo (Vili)
Country: Republic of Congo,
Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal, glass,
claw.
Carving

MK /39

Magic figure

People, style: Teke
Country: DR Congo, Republic of
Congo, Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, textile, hide.
Carving

MK /40

***Nkisi* magic figure**

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, plant fiber,
textile, feathers.
Carving

MK /41

Magic figure

People, style: Chamba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

MK /42

***Agere Ifa* vessel for storing divination items**

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

MK /43

Janus figure

People, style: Yaka
Country: DR Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

MK /44

Figure of *Asye Usu* forest spirit

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Ivory. Carving

MK /45

Door with a deadbolt

People, style: Dogon
Country: Mali
XX century
Wood. Carving

MK /46

***Iagalagana* magic figure**

People, style: Mumuye
Country: Nigeria
XX century
Metal. Forging

MK /47

***Colon* figure depicting a European**

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

MK /48

***Agere Ifa* vessel for storing divination items**

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood. Carving

MK /49

***Nkisi* magic figure**

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, horn, nails, plant
fiber.
Carving

MK /50

***Nkisi* magic figure**

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, horn, metal, feathers,
hide, shells, plant fiber.
Carving

MK /51

***Nkisi Nkondi* figure**

People, style: Kongo (Vili)
Country: Republic of Congo,
Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal, textile,
glass, seeds, bones, plant fiber.
Carving

MK /52

***Nkisi* magic figure**

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

MK /53

***Nkisi* magic figure**

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, shells, metal, leather,
feathers, horn, plant fiber.
Carving

MK /54

***Nkisi Nkondi* figure**

People, style: Kongo (Vili)
Country: Republic of Congo,
Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal, nails,
textile, shells, plant fiber.
Carving

MK /55

***Phemba* figure with child**

People, style: Kongo (Yombe)
Country: DR Congo, Republic of
Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

MK/56***Nkisi* magic figure**

People, style: Songye
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, plant fiber, bone,
 textile, beads, horn.
 Carving

MK/57***Agere Ifa* vessel for storing divination items**

People, style: Yoruba
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

MK/58***Iroke Ifa* tapper for summoning *Orunmila* deity during divination**

People, style: Yoruba / Edo (Bini)
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Ivory. Carving

MK/59***Butti* magic figure**

People, style: Teke
 Country: DR Congo, Republic of Congo, Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, plant fiber, leather,
 metal, bone, textile, horn.
 Carving

MK/60***Nkisi* figure**

People, style: Kongo (Vili)
 Country: Republic of Congo,
 Angola
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, plant fiber,
 feathers, glass, metal, textile.
 Carving

MK/61***Nkisi* magic figure**

People, style: Songye
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, horn, nails.
 Carving

MK/62**Figure of an *Ooni* ruler with attributes of magical power**

People, style: Yoruba
 Country: Nigeria (Ilé-Ife city-state)
 XX century (after a historical reference of XIV–XV centuries)
 Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

MK/63***Iagalagana* magic figure**

People, style: Mumuye
 Country: Nigeria
 XX century
 Wood, patina, metal.
 Carving

MK/64**Figure of *Asye Usu* forest spirit**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, textile.
 Carving

MK/65**Door with a deadbolt**

People, style: Dogon
 Country: Mali
 XX century
 Wood. Carving

MK/66**Female figure with child**

People, style: Yoruba / Edo (Bini)
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Ivory. Carving

MK/67**Figure of *Asye Usu* forest spirit**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment, patina, textile.
 Carving

MK/68**Female figure**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

MK/69***Nkisi* figure on a dog**

People, style: Kongo (Vili)
 Country: Republic of Congo,
 Angola
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, nails.
 Carving

MK/70**Female figure**

People, style: Lulua
 Country: DR Congo
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

MK/71***Iagalagana* magic figure**

People, style: Mumuye
 Country: Nigeria
 XX century
 Wood, patina, metal.
 Carving

MK/72**Figure of *Asye Usu* forest spirit**

People, style: Baule
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, pigment.
 Carving

MK/73

Bell with a finial in the form of a *Phemba* figure

People, style: Kongo (Yombe)
Country: DR Congo, Republic of Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

MK/74

Magic figure

People, style: Yaka
Country: DR Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, plant fiber, textile, seeds.
Carving

MK/75

Female figure

People, style: Atye
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, nails.
Carving

MK/76

Magic figure

People, style: Yaka
Country: DR Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, plant fiber, textile, feathers.
Carving

MK/77

***Nkisi* magic figure**

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, metal, horn. Carving

MK/78

***Tadep* magical ancestor figure**

People, style: Mambila
Country: Nigeria, Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

MK/79

Magic figure

People, style: Teke
Country: DR Congo, Republic of Congo, Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, glass, plant fiber, feathers, textile.
Carving

MK/80

***Opou Ifa* tray for the *Ifa* divination**

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

MK/81

***Nkisi* figure standing on a tortoise**

People, style: Kongo (Vili)
Country: Republic of Congo, Angola
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, plant fiber, textile, feathers.
Carving

MK/82

Figure of *Asye Usu* forest spirit

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, pigment.
Carving

MK/83

Magic figure

People, style: Teke
Country: DR Congo, Republic of Congo, Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, glass. Carving

MK/84

***Iagalagana* magic figure**

People, style: Mumuye
Country: Nigeria
XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

MK/85

***Opou Ifa* tray for the *Ifa* divination**

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina. Carving

MK/86

Female figure

People, style: Luba
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, beads. Carving

MK/87

***Nkisi* magic figure**

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, horn, metal, hide, nails, seeds. Carving

MK/88

***Butti* magic figure**

People, style: Teke
Country: DR Congo, Republic of Congo, Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, plant fiber.
Carving

MK/89

Figure of *Asye Usu* forest spirit

People, style: Baule
Country: Côte d'Ivoire
First half of the XX century
Wood. Carving

MK/90

Tadep magical ancestor figure

People, style: Mambila

Country: Nigeria, Cameroon

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment, feathers.

Carving

MK/91

Figure of *Asye Usu* forest spirit

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood. Carving

MK/92

Iagalagana magic figure

People, style: Mumuye

Country: Nigeria

XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/93

Deadbolt with a latch

People, style: Bambara / Dogon

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/94

Yanda magic figure

People, style: Azande

Country: DR Congo

XX century

Wood, patina, pigment, metal.

Carving

MK/95

Figure of *Asye Usu* forest spirit

People, style: Baule

Country: Côte d'Ivoire

First half of the XX century

Wood. Carving

MK/96

Magic figure

People, style: Teke

Country: DR Congo, Republic of

Congo, Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

MK/97

Phemba figure on a tortoise

People, style: Kongo (Yombe)

Country: DR Congo,

Republic of Congo, Angola

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

RD
RD
N
11

DEATH—

Masks dance at funerals, and a massive amount of traditional African art is related to funerary and commemorative rites. Death is understood as a change of state: rupture, timelessness, and rebirth. In this complex and dangerous rite of passage, the dead are accompanied by the same masks and sculptures that appear during the initiation of adolescents. After mourning, farewell, and burial, the soul of the deceased enters a liminal realm. In this state, it becomes an open target for evil spirits, which, through the dead person, can cause harm to the entire village. Then, the second symbolic funerary rites involving masks are performed. Their purpose is to prevent the deceased from losing the path to the world of the ancestors, to protect from the forces of chaos, and to cleanse the living of the harmful energy of the dead. In some cultures, once a year (or every few years) elaborate commemorative masquerade mysteries are held in order to escort those who have died during that period to the village of the ancestors and to restore order within the cycle of life.

The concepts of the “cult of ancestors” and the “cult of the dead” are in many respects inseparable. Sculptures commonly known as funerary are placed in family shrines, they receive offerings and sacrifices. These may be freestanding male and female statues made of wood or clay, or figured vessels with finials of human figures. Among the Fang and related peoples in Gabon, small human figures and half-figures holding sacrificial bowls, or stylized images of faces, are attached to basket- or box-like containers filled with magical objects and the bodily remains of revered ancestors. In this way, they combine the functions of gravestone, funerary urn, and reliquary. Thus, the commemoration of ancestors coincides with the veneration of ancestors.

The magnificent bronze and terracotta heads from the sacred city of Ilé-Ifè in southwestern Nigeria are masterpieces created by craftsmen of the Yoruba in XII-XV centuries. Their purpose was most likely connected to the cult of commemorating royal ancestors. A memorial cult around bronze heads of sacred rulers also existed in Great Benin. The ancient terracottas of the archaeological cultures of Nok (V century BCE – II century CE) in Nigeria, Sao (V century BCE – XVI century CE) on the borderlands of Chad and Cameroon, and Djenné-Djenno (VIII–XVII centuries) in Mali likewise probably performed a commemorative function and served as funerary statues.

“Statues also die” — says the title of the iconic 1953 documentary film about the fate of masterpieces of African art removed from Africa by colonizers and confined within the walls of European museums. However, many objects do in fact complete their life cycle within their original African environment. Upon fulfilling their purpose, masks and figures are, sooner or later, withdrawn from ritual use: layers of patina and decoration are stripped from their surfaces, sealed cavities are opened, and the amulets and magical components are removed — these can be divided and “transplanted”, like organs, into other objects, while from the former pieces there remains only a beautiful form.

DR/01

Head of the queen mother *Iyoba*

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVI century)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

DR/02

Finial figure of the *Boho a Bwete* reliquary

People, style: Mahongwe

Country: Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, metal.

Carving

DR/03

Horseman

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

DR/04

Head of an *Oba* ruler

People, style: Edo (Bini)

Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)

XX century (after a historical reference of XVIII–XIX centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

DR/05

Head

Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)

Country: Nigeria

Clay. Moulding

DR/06

Head of an *Ooni* ruler

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria (Ilé-Ifè city-state)

XX century (after a historical reference of XII–XV centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

DR/07

Female figure

Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)

Country: Nigeria

Clay. Moulding

DR/08

Female figure

People, style: Akan (Ashanti)

Country: Ghana

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, cowrie shells.

Carving

DR/09

Figure of a man laying down

Djenné-Djenno archaeological culture (V–XVI centuries)

Country: Mali

Clay. Moulding

DR/10

Figure of a sleeping woman

Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)

Country: Nigeria

Clay. Moulding

DR/11

Figure of a woman sitting

Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)

Country: Nigeria

Clay. Moulding

DR/12

Male head

Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)

Country: Nigeria

Clay. Moulding

DR/13

Primal ancestors

People, style: Dogon

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

DR/14

Male figure

Djenné-Djenno archaeological culture (V–XVI centuries)

Country: Mali

Clay. Moulding

DR/15

Kpeliye'e mask of the Poro secret society

People, style: Senufo

Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

DR/16

Figure of a woman with a vessel standing

Djenné-Djenno archaeological culture (V–XVI centuries)

Country: Mali

Clay. Moulding

DR/17

Eyema o Byeri reliquary figure

People, style: Ambete

Country: Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment, plant fiber.

Carving

DR/18

Head

People, style: Akan (?)

Country: Ghana

First half of the XX century

Clay. Moulding

DR/19

Memorial ancestor figure

People, style: Jukun

Country: Nigeria

First half of the XX century

Wood, metal. Carving

DR/20

Seated female figure with child

Djenné-Djenno archaeological culture (V–XVI centuries)

Country: Mali

Clay. Moulding

DR/21

Finial figure of the *Boho a Bwete* reliquary

People, style: Mahongwe

Country: Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, metal, plant fiber.

Carving

DR/22

Eyema o Byeri reliquary figure

People, style: Ambete

Country: Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, metal, plant fiber, cowrie shells.

Carving

DR/23

Male figure seated

Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)

Country: Nigeria

Clay. Moulding

DR/24

Spoon in the form of a female figure

People, style: Senufo

Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina. Carving

DR/25

Female figure with a vessel seated
 Djenné-Djenno archaeological culture (V-XVI centuries)
 Country: Mali
 Clay. Moulding

DR/26

Eyema o Byeri reliquary figure
 People, style: Ambete
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
 Carving

DR/27

Female ancestor figure with a smoking pipe
 People, style: Igbo
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

DR/28

Horseman
 People, style: Dogon (?)
 Country: Mali
 XX century
 Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

DR/29

Finial figure of *Eyema o Byeri* reliquary with ancestor remains
 People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

DR/30

Finial figure of *Eyema o Byeri* reliquary with ancestor remains
 People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood. Carving

DR/31

Head
 Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)
 Country: Nigeria
 Clay. Moulding

DR/32

Finial figure of *Eyema o Byeri* reliquary with ancestor remains
 People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood. Carving

DR/33

Spoon in the form of a female figure
 People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood. Carving

DR/34

Finial figure of *Eyema o Byeri* reliquary with ancestor remains
 People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood. Carving

DR/35

Finial figure of *Eyema o Byeri* reliquary with ancestor remains
 People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood. Carving

DR/36

Eyema o Byeri reliquary figure
 People, style: Ambete
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment, plant fiber.
 Carving

DR/37

Vessel in the form of a human head
 People, style: Akan (?)
 Country: Ghana
 First half of the XX century
 Wood. Carving

DR/38

Female figure
 People, style: Igbo
 Country: Nigeria
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

DR/39

Finial figure of the *Mbulu Ngulu* reliquary
 People, style: Kota
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal.
 Carving

DR/40

Primal ancestors
 People, style: Dogon
 Country: Mali
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina. Carving

DR/41

Finial figure of *Eyema o Byeri* reliquary with ancestor remains
 People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

DR/42

Head
 Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)
 Country: Nigeria
 Clay. Moulding

DR/43

Mask
 People, style: Mossi
 Country: Burkina Faso
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

DR/44**Seated figure**

Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)

Country: Nigeria

Clay. Moulding

DR/45**Seated male figure**

Djenné-Djenno archaeological culture (V–XVI centuries)

Country: Mali

Clay. Moulding

DR/46**Seated male figure**

Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)

Country: Nigeria

Clay. Moulding

DR/47**Seated male figure**

People, style: Dogon

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

DR/48**Male figure**

People, style: Yoruba (the group of Tsoede bronze figures from the villages of Tada and Jebba)

Country: Nigeria

XX century (after a historical reference of XIII–XIV centuries)

Copper alloy. Casting

DR/49***Eyema o Byeri* reliquary figure**

People, style: Tsogo / Vuvu

Country: Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment, plant fiber.

Carving

DR/50**Finial figure of the *Boho a Bwete* reliquary**

People, style: Mahongwe

Country: Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, pigment, metal.

Carving

DR/51**Seated figure**

Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)

Country: Nigeria

Clay. Moulding

DR/52**Finial figure of *Eyema o Byeri* reliquary with ancestor remains**

People, style: Fang

Country: Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment. Carving

DR/53**Spoon with *Eyema o Byeri* figure**

People, style: Ambete

Country: Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment, plant fiber.

Carving

DR/54***Kanaga* crest mask for damma memorial celebrations**

People, style: Dogon

Country: Mali

First half of the XX century

Wood, pigment, plant fiber, leather.

Carving

DR/55**Male head**

Sokoto archaeological culture (V century BCE – II century CE)

Country: Nigeria

Clay. Moulding

DR/56**Head of the usurper Lajuwa**

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria (Ilé-Ifè city-state)

XX century (after a historical reference of XII–XV centuries)

Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

DR/57**Seated male figure**

Djenné-Djenno archaeological culture (V–XVI centuries)

Country: Mali

Clay. Moulding

DR/58**Finial figure of the *Boho a Bwete* reliquary**

People, style: Mahongwe

Country: Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, metal.

Carving

DR/59**Half-figure**

Sokoto archaeological culture (V century BCE – II century CE)

Country: Nigeria

Clay. Moulding

DR/60***Eyema o Byeri* reliquary figure**

People, style: Ambete

Country: Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, metal. Carving

DR/61**Head**

People, style: Yoruba

Country: Nigeria (Ilé-Ifè city-state)

XX century (after a historical reference of XII–XV centuries)

Clay. Moulding

DR/62**Finial figure of the *Boho a Bwete* reliquary**

People, style: Mahongwe

Country: Gabon

First half of the XX century

Wood, patina, metal.

Carving

DR/63**Vessel**

People, style: Mambila (?)
 Country: Nigeria, Cameroon
 XX century
 Clay. Moulding

DR/64**Memorial figure**

Bura-Asinda-Sukka
 archaeological culture (III-XIII
 centuries)
 Country: Niger
 Clay. Moulding

DR/65**Head**

Nok archaeological culture (XV
 century BCE – V century CE)
 Country: Nigeria
 Clay. Moulding

DR/66**Memorial figure**

Bura-Asinda-Sukka
 archaeological culture (III-XIII
 centuries)
 Country: Niger
 Clay. Moulding

DR/67***Eyema o Byeri* reliquary figure**

People, style: Ambete
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, pigment. Carving

DR/68**Finial figure of *Eyema o Byeri*
reliquary with ancestor remains**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood. Carving

DR/69**Head with a snake in its
forehead**

Djenné-Djenno archaeological
 culture (V-XVI centuries)
 Country: Mali
 Clay. Moulding

DR/70**Male half-figure**

Sokoto archaeological culture
 (V century BCE – II century CE)
 Country: Nigeria
 Clay. Moulding

DR/71**Finial figure of the *Boho a Bwete*
reliquary**

People, style: Mahongwe
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal, textile.
 Carving

DR/72**Head**

Nok archaeological culture (XV
 century BCE – V century CE)
 Country: Nigeria
 Clay. Moulding

DR/73**Head of the queen mother *Iyoba***

People, style: Edo (Bini)
 Country: Nigeria (Great Benin)
 XX century
 Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

DR/74**Head**

Nok archaeological culture (XV
 century BCE – V century CE)
 Country: Nigeria
 Clay. Moulding

DR/75**Head**

Sokoto archaeological culture
 (V century BCE – II century CE)
 Country: Mali
 Clay. Moulding

DR/76**Female figure**

Nok archaeological culture (XV
 century BCE – V century CE)
 Country: Nigeria
 Clay. Moulding

DR/77**Finial figure of the *Mbulu Ngulu*
reliquary**

People, style: Kota
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal.
 Carving

DR/78**Seated male figure**

Nok archaeological culture (XV
 century BCE – V century CE)
 Country: Nigeria
 Clay. Moulding

DR/79**Finial figure of the *Boho a Bwete*
reliquary**

People, style: Mahongwe
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal.
 Carving

DR/80***Kpeliye'e* mask of the Poro
secret society**

People, style: Senufo
 Country: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali,
 Burkina Faso
 First half of the XX century
 Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

DR/81**Finial figure of *Eyema o Byeri*
reliquary**

People, style: Fang
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood. Carving

DR/82**Finial figure of the *Mbulu Ngulu*
reliquary**

People, style: Kota
 Country: Gabon
 First half of the XX century
 Wood, patina, metal.
 Carving

DR/83

Head

Koma-Builsa archaeological culture (XIII-XIX centuries)
Country: Ghana
XX century (after a historical reference of XIII-XIX centuries)
Stone

DR/84

Standing female figure

Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)
Country: Nigeria
Clay. Moulding

DR/85

Kifwebe mask of the Bwadi Bwa Kifwebe secret society

People, style: Songye
Country: DR Congo
First half of the XX century
Wood, pigment. Carving

DR/86

Smoking pipe

People, style: Bamileke, Bamum
Country: Cameroon
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting

DR/87

Finial figure of *Eyema o Byeri* reliquary with ancestor remains

People, style: Fang
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood. Carving

DR/88

Gbene cup for palm wine in the form of a human figure

People, style: Koro
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, beads, cowrie shells.
Carving

DR/89

Half-figure

Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)
Country: Nigeria
Clay. Moulding

DR/90

Mask of the ruler Obalufon

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria (Ilé-Ifè city-state)
XX century (after a historical reference of the XII century)
Copper alloy. Casting

DR/91

Finial figure of the *Mbulu Ngulu* reliquary

People, style: Kota
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, patina, metal.
Carving

DR/92

Head

Sao archaeological culture (V century BCE – II century CE)
Country: Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria
Stone

DR/93

Finial figure of the *Bohona Bwete* reliquary

People, style: Mahongwe
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, metal.
Carving

DR/94

Head

People, style: Igbo (?)
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Clay, pigment. Moulding

DR/95

Head

Nok archaeological culture (XV century BCE – V century CE)
Country: Nigeria
Clay. Moulding

DR/96

Staff

People, style: Chamba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Wood, metal. Carving

DR/97

Finial figure of *Byeri* reliquary with ancestor remains

People, style: Fang
Country: Gabon
First half of the XX century
Wood, plant fiber, textile.
Carving

DR/98

Standing male figure

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy. Casting

DR/99

Bell for summoning spirits

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria
First half of the XX century
Metal alloy. Casting

DR/100

Head of an *Ooni* ruler

People, style: Yoruba
Country: Nigeria (Ilé-Ifè city-state)
XX century (after a historical reference of XII-XV centuries)
Metal alloy (brass?). Casting