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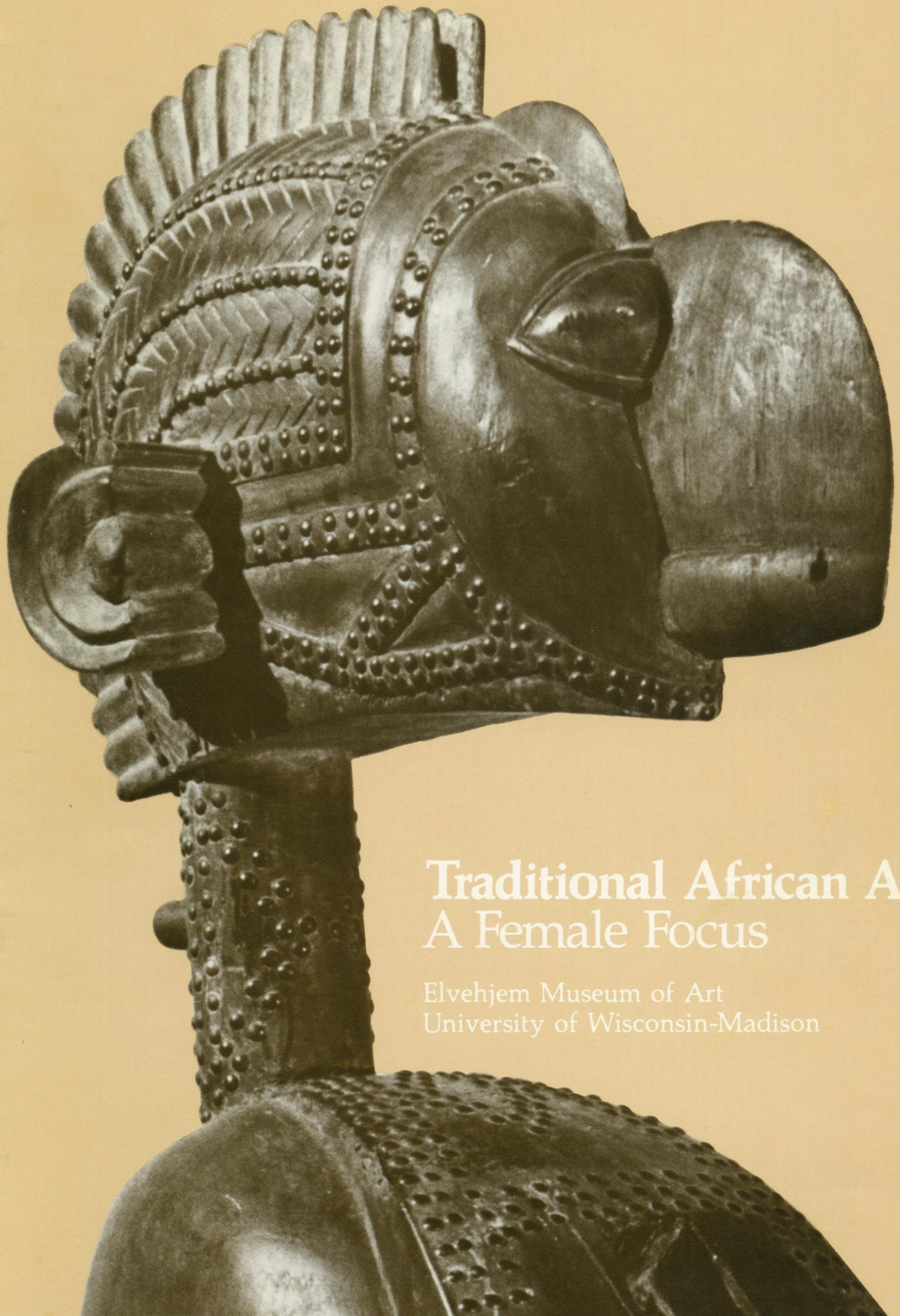
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Traditional African Art: A Female Focus

Elvehjem Museum of Art
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Brass and parrot feathers
on a velvet skin.
White cowrie shells
on black buttocks.
Her eyes sparkle in the forest,
like the sun on the river.
She is the wisdom of the forest
she is the wisdom of the river.
Where the doctor failed
she cures with fresh water.
Where medicine is impotent
she cures with cool water.
She cures the child
and does not charge the father.
She feeds the barren woman with honey
and her dry body swells up
like a juicy palm fruit.
Oh, how sweet
is the touch of a child's hand!

Poem to the River Goddess (Yemoja)
Yoruba, Nigeria
Little, 1973:13

Traditional African Art: A Female Focus

Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison

June 20-July 26, 1981

Guest Curator: Freida High-Wasikhongo
assisted by Kweku Andrews



Bundu Mask, Mende, Sierra Leone, 15".
David Kuntz, photographer.

This catalogue was prepared in conjunction with an exhibition of traditional African art; **Traditional African Art: A Female Focus**, held at the Elvehjem Museum of Art, June 20-July 20, 1981.

The exhibition was sponsored and organized by the Elvehjem Museum of Art, the African Studies Program and the Anonymous Fund.

Cover photo: *Nimba* goddess, headdress, Baga, Guinea, 48". Illinois State University Photo Services.

Foreword

In their beauty, originality and aesthetic force, African art forms evoke a universal response. Yet they can only be fully understood and appreciated within the contexts of the social life of which they are an integral and essential part. This exhibit—if looked on in aesthetic terms alone—is remarkable for its diversity. Yet all the works shown relate to a common theme: the way they incorporate female elements of African traditional societies through representation or symbolism. The exhibit therefore takes us some way toward a more complete understanding of the works included. Simultaneously, it reminds us of the wonderful diversity with which the common elements of human experience are treated in artistic expression.

Kweku Andrews, Ghanaian sculptor and art historian first suggested an exhibition of African traditional art in the Elvehjem. The idea was taken up with much enthusiasm. It was Freida High-Wasikhongo who provided the exhibition's theme, and who has been principally responsible for its design and organization. We wish to acknowledge the extraordinary energy and resourcefulness that Professor High-Wasikhongo has brought to the task. She has reviewed and drawn upon the African art collections of four museums in Wisconsin and Illinois. Working with the equally energetic assistance of Mr. Andrews, Professor High-Wasikhongo has also drawn upon ten private collections, mainly, but not exclusively, in the Madison area. The result is a rich and beautiful collection of African art forms, one which we expect to inform and delight viewers, and which we are proud to present.

Freida High-Wasikhongo, Associate Professor of Art History in the Department of Afro-American Studies, has studied and taught African and Afro-American art history for many years. Herself a painter and printmaker, she is interested both in African traditional and contemporary art. She has previously prepared exhibitions of African and Afro-American art in Madison and Milwaukee. Kweku Andrews, Lecturer in Art at the University of Kumasi in Ghana is a sculptor, primarily in wood. He has taught African art history, both at Kumasi and the University of Wisconsin. During 1979-80 he served in Sheboygan as Wisconsin Ar-

tist in Residence. During the present year he is serving as consultant on African art and culture with the African Studies Program.

This is the first exhibition of African sculpture that has been presented in the Elvehjem Museum of Art. It is jointly sponsored by the Elvehjem and the African Studies Program. The African Studies Program has a long-standing interest in presentations that effectively communicate to Americans a sense of the richness of the African artistic heritage. A partnership with the Elvehjem on this basis was a natural development, for the Elvehjem is committed to innovative exhibits that enrich the aesthetic experience of Madison viewers by drawing on the artistic cultural traditions of the world. The Elvehjem and the African Studies Program, therefore, happily join in an expression of gratitude to Professor High-Wasikhongo and her co-workers for making possible this beautiful and illuminating exhibit.

Katherine Mead
Director
Elvehjem Museum of Art

Paul A. Beckett
Associate Director
African Studies Program

Introduction

Traditional African Art: A Female Focus through exhibition and catalogue reveals the diversity of forms and images projected in relation to women in Africa. It modestly presents the richness in indigenous African art and culture with the notion of allowing the audience to become acquainted with female-associated African sculpture despite its total removal from cultural context. The continental vastness of African art and its endless stylistic variation, is to an important extent transcended by harmonious color and common textural elements. Simultaneously, social, political and cultural concerns defy boundaries, conveying ideologies of ritualistic life qualities. The natural order of womankind reflects ideals of feminine beauty and realities of woman power on earth and in the ancestral world.

It is often noted that the serious and objective study of African art is still in its embryonic stage of development. It must be pointed out that an academic focus on women in African art has barely been conceived.

The theme of Women in all its variations, including the important mother-and-child image, is widespread and constant in African art — an observation that is hardly new. The difficulty is that catalogues of African sculpture have tended to note the theme without coming to grips with the dynamics of its setting in a particular place and time, and thereby risked doing an immense disservice to the richly divergent aspirations and achievements of the Black African cultures concerned. Somehow, the vital involvement of African women in some of the very institutions which have sustained great art traditions (e.g., divine kingships, initiation societies, divination cults) have often remained obscure behind such facile expressions as “fertility figure” or “Queen Mother” (Glaze, 1975: 25).

Glaze further notes the necessity “. . . to take a closer look into women’s roles in all those spheres of aesthetic expression that are integral to the structure of social, political and spiritual authority in the community” (Glaze, 1975:25).

This exhibit proposes to “take a closer look into women’s roles” through an assemblage of masks and sculpture, summarizing the significance of each

in relation to the “art event” (phrase coined by Jean Borgatti). Concerns within societies associated with women in particular are reflected through selected forms which have been thematically classified for the sake of concise and direct introduction. Divisions are broad and overlapping and may stimulate controversy. However, they maximize the possibilities of conveying forms and functions within the limited context. The divisions comprise fourteen countries and twenty-four ethnic groups and are as follows: 1) **Birth/Fertility/Puberty** — a category which contains ritualistic forms related to ideals of motherhood, feminine beauty and female role expectations; 2) **Worship** — subdivided into (a) **Mythological/Ancestral**; incorporates legendary heroes and animals and (b) **Ancestral** — differentiated through honoring deceased individuals who have ascended into the tutelary echelon; 3) **Social Control** — includes art that is used as agents of social control in association with secret societies; and 4) **Magical** — the least represented — includes forms often referred to as fetishes due to their function and appearance.

Before further discussion of the contents of this exhibition, it is essential to emphasize the importance of the “art event” which in essence is a ritualistic drama, a festival.

In artistic terms, festivals are lavish, organized displays: objects, dance, costumes, drama, and people. They also incorporate various life-sustaining rituals which recur many times during the festival period. Indeed, one definition of the festival is ritual aggrandized into spectacle or pageant (Cole and Ross, 1977:200).

It cannot be momentary or static, but rather is a rhythmic series of events flowing together toward climax and resolution (Cole and Ross, 1977:200).

People emerge from community compounds into adjacent courtyards to witness and/or engage in festive activities that promote social, spiritual and aesthetic values. They respond to masqueraders who dance, sing, chant and pray, moving in harmony with drums and musical instruments which also convey messages of history and praise.

The ritual at the other extreme also occurs in iso-

lation. Personal shrines, for example can be found in the privacy of homes, compounds, or "Bush" and involve particular ceremonies related to dieties, ancestors, twins, etc. The dynamics of motion and color become subdued as figurative art forms of representational and symbolic qualities function in protective, preventive, and other ascribed capacities. While figures are generally connected with this type of worship, masks are more associated with the more forceful drama.

African art forms mirror societal mores and attitude. The majority of the forms in the exhibition are carved in wood which is a medium traditionally inherited along male sex lines. Pottery, textiles, basket/mat-making and similar art production are traditionally passed along the maternal line to daughters. Consequently, an ideal female focus would be to present greater diversity than that which has been included in the current display. It would add pottery, etc., along with body arts, hair style and other decorative media of and by women. Such an exhibition would contribute to greater understanding of female creativity in the area of what has traditionally been referred to as crafts, a term now being challenged by artists and art historians. The current exhibition shows forms which have been carved by males and in some cases made by females (e.g. Kanuri dolls of Nigeria) that capture feminine beauty and espouses womanhood. Its defined categories convey aesthetics and social standards projecting women in varying roles including mothers as portrayed in the classic mother and child theme, maiden spirits rendering virginal purity and feminine beauty, "mothers of the night" as captured in ceremonies performed by the Gelede cult to appease witches and thereby summoning benevolent forces, devotees of dieties which establish a degree of social control and status; protective spirits such as the Dea spirit of the Dan in Ivory Coast. It does not include well-known leadership figures such as the Queen Mother of Benin. However, leadership roles become apparent as associations of social control must meet aesthetically and morally the approval of elderly women connected with respective organizations. Already mentioned is Gelede. Another association to note is the traditionally powerful Ekpe male society of the Ibibio and Efik of Nigeria whose origins are among

the Ekoi of Nigeria and Cameroon. It has been documented that "women who have distinguished themselves in their communities are invited to purchase membership into Ekpe" (Ekpo, 1978:75).

Birth, Puberty, Fertility

Birth and puberty are the first two stages of rites de passage and are particularly significant in that they mark the child's entry into society and subsequent introduction to role expectation. Celebrations related to such occasions and those marking other stages vary according to society, but are times of festivity.

Even prior to conception of a child, various rituals are undertaken by women to ensure fertility.

A woman may decorate her body with earth pigments or scars to induce pregnancy and again when pregnant, to insure the safe delivery of a handsome child. The newborn baby is often rubbed with chalk to show parental pride, to ask the gods to let him live and to let him grow strong and healthy. Even as a child she may paint his body and embellish it with beads or other adornments either for the demands of worship or purely for decoration (Cole, 1970:9).

(Ritual concerns male and female children.)
Ritualistic forms related to birth appear throughout the continent. The Mossi of the Upper Volta produce dolls, *Biiga*, for young girls which may also provide the function of ensuring childbirth upon adulthood.

If a married woman does not bear a child within a reasonable time period, the doll of her childhood may become a votive figure that she carries tucked into her wrapper/skirt in the belief that it will help her to become pregnant (Walker: 1981).

Figures, often referred to as *Ibeji* dolls, are produced by the Yoruba of Nigeria upon the birth and death of twins (this will be discussed under worship.) Scholarly information on East Africa related to childbirth is limited. But it is noted by Jean Brown that simple peglike dolls were made by mothers for their children among the Giriama. She additionally reports that these dolls were also worn on the backs of women who had not been able to produce children (Brown, 1972; p. 58). Dolls

among the Samburu (I, 8) and Turkana (Illus. 4, No. I, 10,11) are given to young girls in connection with fertility and future roles of motherhood. "Beautiful stylized woden dolls" traditionally given to young girls as fertility symbols during the first menstruation rites were common among the Kami of Kenya and the Zaramo of Tanzania. Also in Tanzania, dolls (*ebisusano bygbana*) are found among the Kerebe which are made by young girls strictly for play (Hartwig, 1969:95).

Grasping an idea of fertility related items in East Africa is complicated not only by the scarcity of literature, but also by conflicting literature. Gamst in his study of the Qemant noted that the Qemant, Falasha and the Amhara of Ethiopia traditionally wear amulets as protection against evil and malevolent spirits. He takes the position that "they have no other sacred manmade objects or relics of any kind" (Gamst, 1969:54). On the other hand Pankhurst includes in his discussion of "Old-Time" Ethiopian handcrafts a brief section on earthenware in which he notes the diversity of forms (mainly utilitarian) produced by females (Pankhurst, R., 1964:241). He includes a photograph showing female forms, equestrian figures, animals and birds produced by the Falashas, or Ethiopian Jews (1964:235). The scant information given allows the reader to assume they were produced by females. Stylistically, the female forms emphasize attributes of women including enlarged breasts, elongated and fat-ringed necks. One image reflects the mother and child icon. The overall appearance of the human figure suggests fertility and ancestral functions. Two similar figures are shown in the current exhibition (I, 7, 8). They were collected among the Argu (which includes Qemant and Falasha) by Aiden Southall (anthropologist). Their origin is Falasha (Southall, personal communication: 1981).

An area, heavily penetrated by Islam, is that of the Kanuri people who also produce small dolls of wax. These are said to have been made by girls between ages seven and ten for play, gifts, and now to sell. Produced in clay and beeswax, these represent adolescents approximately ten to seventeen. (Abdullah, personal communication, 1981). Known as *Kalayakka* (three headed or little girl), youth and virginity are symbolized through the hair style which is worn in three parts and shaved in between

(Hutchison, personal communication, 1981), (I, 2-4). Various theories attempt to explain their function which ranges from inducing fertility to mere entertainment, the latter being the most accepted function noted today.

The most widely known fertility doll in Africa is the *Akua'ba* doll (Illus. 1), a highly stylized monochromatic female form iconographically rendering traits of feminine beauty. These figures are "... consecrated by priests who invoke the influence of their deity to induce pregnancy." After pregnancy, they are either returned to the shrines of the responsible deities (Ross and Cole, 1977:103) or maintained as memorials to the child/children in household shrines (Cole and Ross, 1977:104). Connected with *Akua'ba* is an Akan legend about a woman named Akua who was distraught because of barrenness.

She took her problem to a priest, who instructed her to commission a small wooden child (*dua ba*) from a carver and to carry the surrogate child on her back as if it were real. Akua was instructed to care for the figure as she would a living baby, even to give it gifts of beads and other trinkets. She did these things, but after a while was laughed at by her fellow villagers for her foolishness: "Akua, is that your child? Oh, look at Akua's child," they teased. With time the wooden figure became known as *Akuaba* (Akua's child). Eventually, however, she conceived and gave birth to a beautiful daughter, and her detractors came around to adopting the same measures to cure barrenness (Cole and Ross: 1977, 103).

Akua'ba's existence and function expresses the recognized necessity of motherhood for Akan women and indeed for women throughout Africa. Akan women particularly welcome female children because of the matrilineal heritage.

Motherhood certainly is universal. Social pressures related to it obviously vary. Within indigenous socio-cultural thinking in Africa, it is an honor. Pregnancy in some areas is emphasized through various rituals including changes in appearance such as ornamentation and hairstyle.

Motherhood is greatly honored among the Bantu negroes. Bagongo women, when expecting their firstborn are entitled to dress their hair like the chief's, in the shape of buffalo horns (Torday, 1925: plate facing p. 168).

Torday also notes, this form of coiffure "is an archaic headdress; many old head-shaped caps are carved like that" (Torday, 1925: 100).

The symbolic chieftainly association portrays the traditional kind of status given to women of the given area as they enter into motherhood, thereby conforming to role expectation.

It might be of interest to note that pregnancy has associated with it taboos which affect men. These obviously vary from ethnic group to ethnic group. Nevertheless, men too have their mores to observe during this period. The Bushongo male, for example, having learned during initiation many things, including "not to ill-treat his wife," to "respect other people's wives," "to respect woman's modesty," etc., must make certain adjustments. For him it is time to observe *Ikina*. Therefore it is taboo for him to "carry on with another lady while his wife is pregnant, or even meet with one of his former sweethearts; the expected child would surely die"; (Torday, 1925:195). Torday emphasizes this point by noting the following case:

. . . everyone knew, and the pretty girl knew, that he was as good as a prisoner; his wife was expecting a baby, and, in accordance with the custom of the country, she had cut his belt; if he rose, his clothes would fall off, and — oh, honor! — at any moment he might be called not to the bed of his wife, but to go to bed himself, and be nursed till the trouble was over. That is why the girl was grinning so maliciously (Torday, 1925:174).

Certainly this case does not reflect the typical taboos. Yet it is interesting to note that such historical occurrences existed on a continent which is known for polygny.

Synthesized values of purity, pride, beauty and motherhood instilled since early childhood become pronounced during female adolescence. Concrete manifestations occur in puberty ceremonies celebrating adolescents' entry into adulthood and as-

sumed readiness to enter accompanying responsible roles. Despite differing ethnic rituals related to this transitional stage of life, unifying factors become evident through revelation of preparedness on the girl's part. Having received training through secluded traditional educational institutions, often referred to as "bush schools," pampering and fattening, and in particular areas clitoridectomy, these young women profess to the community their newly attained status during elaborate festivities of initiation.

Early accounts provide a glance at puberty rituals. One such account of a 1918 observation among the Efik Ibibio reveals the seriousness with which society marked the occasion then.

After reaching the age of puberty the girl (*n-kaiferi*) is clothed in an embroidered cloth cap, a loin-roll of bright coloured cloth, a collar-ette ornamented with beads and cowry shells, beaded shoulder braces and leglets of gaily-coloured cloth or coiled brass rods. Necklets or armlets of beadwork may also be worn. She is then taken to the fattening hut (*m-bobi*) by her mother. The huts are on the outskirts of the village. Her period of seclusion (*okukho m-bobi*) may extend from six months to two years according to her parents' financial position. Whilst in the hut she is called a woman of seclusion (*n-wan n-kukho*). During the fattening process she is compelled to eat vast quantities of fat-producing foods, including pounded yams (*fu-fu*) cooked in palm oil. She is not allowed to exert herself in any way, and on no account must she perspire (Malcolm, 1925:113).

In addition to other rituals, she undergoes clitoridectomy (*ana m-bobi*). Upon completing the seclusion period (*oworo m-bobi*), she leaves the hut, and appears before the community which greets her with much rejoicing and gifts. She then is taken to the *isa ekpo* of her ancestors to sacrifice a white chicken. Afterwards, she is ready for marriage, a ceremony "closely connected with the ekpo (ghost) cult" of her ethnic group. Taking oath before *isa ekpo* she proclaims to be faithful, and if in violation, she would experience sterility, still-born or deformed children (Malcolm, 1925:114). Jeffreys gives particular attention to the *Nyama*

society, a woman's association which controls Ibibio puberty rituals. (It must be mentioned that *Nyama* is practically defunct today as a result of missionary impact (Jeffreys, 1956:27). He additionally elaborates upon body scarification (*nko*) as an element of ritual which signifies "blameless maidenhood." This is a particularly important ceremonial element because it is a permanent document of adherence to social mores. Only "virgins and those who have never made the mistake of giving birth to a child, an aborted pregnancy is no bar, are allowed to pass through the hands of society." Clitoridectomy and cicatrization communicate respectability and the entitlement to a public marriage.

An unmarried mother is prevented by the *Nyama* from undergoing clitoridectomy, body cicatrization, the fattening process, and participation in the public ceremony of parading with brides-to-be naked in the market on the day of marriage. Such a girl is immediately made to wear the full length loin cloth of a married woman (Jeffreys, 1956:15).

A physical examination performed by the *Nyama* society during the stay in the fattening house assures virginity. Should a girl "be found to have a ruptured hymen she cannot be married in the formal, yearly ceremony before the sub-tribe in the paramount village" (Messenger, 1971:216). Chastity then among unmarried women becomes a social norm among Ibibio and is not a unique phenomenon in indigenous Africa, for similar accounts appear in other areas of Africa. Among the Okrika, the "fattening ceremony" traditionally commands much attention and respect due to its moral value. "It aims primarily at preserving the virginity of a girl until marriage" (Nigeria, 1959:341). Any girl who violates the standards of premarital chastity brings shame to herself, her family and . . . can no longer perform the ceremony (Nigeria, 1959:347). Among the Matabele in South Africa, a girl having undergone puberty rites becomes *itomba* and is placed under the guidance of a woman who supposedly becomes responsible for her moral behavior, particularly that which is concerned with preserving "the purity of the girl until she is married" (Jones, 1921:147-150). In East Africa, clay

figurines symbolizing social mores are generally used in puberty ceremonies of both sexes (Cory, 1944:459-464).

A female figure (Illus. 3) included in the exhibition symbolically represents an Ibibio girl who has completed puberty ceremonies (*eyen mbobi*). The body proportions render a stout or plump individual whose body bears *nko* (cicatrization). The red ochre color draws parallel with rituals of *eyen mbobi* whose bodies are rubbed periodically with clay and camwood. Additional aesthetic standards are reflected in the elaborate hair style and elongated neck. Functioning under the auspices of the male *Ekon* society, the puppet is used in plays which dramatize various aspects of society, and especially those associated with upholding social mores (Messenger, 1971:208-222).

Perhaps the most well-known art form associated with female initiation in Africa is the *Bundu* or *Sowei* mask (Illus. 2) which is worn by members of the Sande society, a female organization of the Mende in Sierra Leone which, in fact, participates to a degree in social control. "Sande art is used to express in concrete form the religious and social values of the group" (Richards, 1974:48). It reflects symbolic stylization related to womanhood. Elaborate hairstyle, fat-ringed neck, and highly polished dark surface signifies feminine beauty and wealth.

For the Sande, the supreme purpose of a woman's existence is to attain a state of both spiritual and physical beauty, and it is a function of the organization to help its initiates conform (Richards, 1974:51). Sande members, through the institution of the "Greegree Bush," instruct girls in matters concerning "homecraft," child care, sexuality, and correct attitudes toward a husband, other men and co-wives" (Bascom, 1973:52).

The great "crisis" of puberty is almost universally marked in Africa by the wearing of special dress and paints, and for the males, masks or disguising costumes. Girls emerge from the "fattening house" rubbed red and shining with oils and camwood, hair tressed in sculptural shapes, legs and arms adorned with beads (Cole, 1970:9).

Upon completion of the honorable and extravagant puberty celebration, the young girl leaves behind the period of her life when she sits in leisure with rich food and expensive wrappers, the period where it was "she who sits as King" with power and privilege nearly equivalent to a chief. She is then ready to assume her role as a responsible adult in the society which includes economic, social, cultural and political involvement. In the practical everyday setting, for example, Foss notes Urhobo women "work with great perseverance producing yam, cassava or maize to feed their families, gathering firewood and water, and preparing daily meals" (1979:43). As full-fledged adults, females, maintaining pride and self-containment, join the community fully aware of their expectations and more often than not become very much involved in physical labor and cultural activities that sustain and perpetuate established social patterns. Established patterns are upheld through ceremonies including art forms which visually sustain the value of motherhood, fertility, beauty, strength, and communal cooperation. A final example to note is the Nimba headdress (cover, Illus. 5) symbolizing the goddess of fertility who also functions to protect pregnant women of the Baga (Guinea). Birdlike nose and crest (porpoinong bird symbolizes fertility throughout West Africa) combined with human female characteristics, emphasizes through bold and angular movements elements of feminine grace and power.

Worship—Mythological / Ancestral

Universally, woman/man has created myths to explain tangible and intangible forces. Historical and legendary myths provide information about a particular people's socio-cultural beliefs. Concepts related to supernatural beings, deities, human behavior, animals, etc. reflect traditions. Some of such stories include elements of truth while others are purely fanciful, but none are generally accepted literally.

Myths in Africa include stories of the creation, deities, ancestors, heroes, animals, etc. African mythology shows that myths are geographically dispersed throughout Africa and are manifested in artistic production.

Art shows man in the stages of his existence, birth, life and death. African motherhood shows the mystery and power of life, portrayed frankly in all part of the female body. The mystery of death is held to be against nature, and there is a universal belief in survival and triumph over death, demonstrated by the countless death masks, and by societies which represent the living ancestors. The gods, powers of heaven and earth, and the ancestors, are all "clouds of witnesses" which form the audience to man's career on earth, and the providence that helps him in trouble (Parrinder, 1967:14).

Artistic forms of soft wood project mythological beliefs in the Western Sudan. Already mentioned is the story of Akua in coastal Ghana. Myths related to other forms in the exhibition originate in Mali among the Bambara who produce the symbolic *Chi (Tji) Wara* antelope (Illus. 6) and the Dogon (both of Mali) represented by the *Kanaga* mask (II A, 3), ancestral figure (II. A, 4) and granery door (II A, 5). Coastal forms represented are connected with *Shango*, the Nigeria Yoruba god of thunder (II A, 6-8), and *Mwana pwo* (young girl) (II A, 9) of the Chokwe in Angola in relation to Chokwe origin.

The Bambara view the antelope with reverence. They see it as the working animal which taught cultivation to mankind. Consequently, the symbolic antelope appears in various art forms related to ceremonies of their five age grade societies. The complete antelope emerges in ceremonies of the *Flan kuru* society, a male society with the responsibility of agricultural production. The male antelope must perform with its female companion, for the ceremonies of the *Chi Wara* are those of fecundity. Bambara religion in general is concerned with increase. Its most important rites are directed toward aiding and controlling the fertility of nature and through sympathetic association fertility of human beings (Goldwater, 1960:10).

Masks and figures of the Dogon emerge from cosmogenic philosophy which arranges the focus of the universe in a hierarchy (Lem, 1949:19). The *Kanaga* mask used in funeral ceremonies is associated with the Awa, the controlling society of the Dogon.

The face represents the creator god from whom evolved the events leading to the building of the foundations of the society. The superstructure (cross of Lorraine; long, vertical pole treated grilles alternating with full squares; and a small board perforated with double verticle zigzags surmounted with half a calabash, symbolically evoke these events (Delange, 1974:2)

The feminine element is connected with the lower world or the earth and her relationship with the upper world or Amma, the creator god. Mythological connotations are reflected in their union and subsequently woman's/man's origin.

Anthropomorphic masks symbolize both people and totemistic animals. Similarly, sculpture renders mythical incarnations. Concepts related to woman's/man's origin are manifested in the seated figure in the show which appears to represent the Primordial Couple of the Dogon. Male and female elements are expressed through headdress, beard, breasts, child on back and bracelets. Regarding the last component, Laude notes that three bracelets symbolize maleness while four are connected with femaleness (Laude, 1973:n.p.). The figure wears two groups of three bracelets on each arm, thereby reflecting more subtly the synthesis of gender.

Granery doors (II A) along with numerous other more utilitarian type objects show in bas relief deep concern for religious beliefs. Primordial couples, *nommo* (bisexual spirit), *tellem* (guardian spirit) along with lizards, crocodiles, antelopes and many other animals adorn their surfaces and establish special links.

Religious concepts synthesize legendary and ancestral elements. One such manifestation is the ritualistic *oshe shango* an emblem of the Yoruba Shango cult. Representing the thunderbolt, the double-blade ax conveys messages of fire, punishment, death, and humanity (Thompson, 1971: ch 12/1). It is carried in performance by cult priestesses and priests in ceremonies in honor of Shango who, according to oral history, was the fourth king of the Yoruba. The double-ax incorporates the "fundamental symbol of twinness and the balance of motion, itself compounding asymmetry and order, makes of the cult of Shango a memorable interpretation of the duality of heaven

and earth" (Thompson, 1971: Ch 12/6). Red and white symbolizing violence and calm are the colors of the cult. Female votive figures join the thunderbolt in creating a sense of balance (II B, 6,7).

Fire is in her hair. This is no idle reference; only the devotee can master such violence without pain or danger. Her respectful kneeling is also a sign of her protection, for the guiltless never meet the war which is waged at the back of the eyes (Thompson, 1971: Ch 12/13).

Shango's shrine has been defined as the palace of Shango. It includes many symbolic forms and figures, the devotee being one (Illus. 7) who along with other alter figures symbolizes "followers or courtiers of the king" (Lawal in Thompson, 1971:12/4). The kneeling figure shown represents a female devotee adorned with status-giving cowrie shells, symmetrically expresses balanced coolness, emphasized by the *oshe shango* which she holds.

Legendary figures among the Chokwe (Tuchokwe) in Angola as among the Dogon give reference to the primordial couple *Mwana pwo* (II A,9) the female and her male counterpart Chihongo. The former represents a beautiful young maiden and the latter symbolizes wealth (Bascom, 1973:150). *Mwana Pwo* is the "symbol of the young woman who after initiation and the ritual isolation period is ready for marriage and for the bearing of a large family" (Bascom, 1973:63). In ceremonies she appears in tightly fitted fibre costume and false breasts carved in wood. She dances in "short, mincing steps" in ceremonies of the Mukanda society, a male organization. Personifying femininity and grace, she is thought to be connected with sex education, although she also is reportedly called upon to entertain guests of chiefs, advertise political rallies, and even to collect funds from motorists (Crowley in d'Azevedo, 1975:230).

Worship-Ancestral

"Aesthetic power is an impressive carved image translated into spiritual power" (Cole and Ross, 1977:103). Composed images serving as repositories of ancestral spirits convey elements of calm and strength. Placed in clan, family, or personal shrines of worship, such figures appear standing and sit-

ting, and portray qualities of dignity and control. They are of particular significance for their presence indicates the interrelationship between the physical and spiritual world. Members of societies dispersed throughout Africa offer sacrifice to and request the protection of these guardian spirits who act as censors of human activities.

Natural disasters, accidents, homicide, etc. cause societies to seek aid from ancestors. On the other hand, the desire for children, health, etc., are also reasons to solicit their attention, for they are regarded as spiritual entities who enforce moral order. Symbolic carvings attest to ancestral presence and protection, and represent both sexes. In some instances roles of the deceased may be revealed as in the mother and child image of the Mende (II B,1). Aesthetic values reflect characteristics standard of repective societies. Plumpness, elaborate hairstyle, fat-ringed neck, and dark monochromatic appearance are obvious desired elements as is the status of motherhood. Representation of body arts such as scarification, tatooing, body painting and ornamentation is a constant which emphasize status and feminine beauty.

Standing figures have many meanings, "poise, dignity, and stability" being most significant (Cole and Foss, 1977:113). Seated figures connote privilege, status, and power. Stylistic variations pronounce regional differences ranging from naturalistic Baule (Ivory Coast) forms (Illus. 12) to geometric simplification such as that found among the Nbulu-Ngulu of the Bakota (Gabon) (Illus. 11).

Location of ancestral figures vary according to the nature of their specific function. Ancestor figures among the Mambila of Cameroon can be seen outside ancestral huts (II B, 5,6). The Nbulu-Ngulu is placed on basket-type containers which house bones of the deceased and serve as a repository for her/his soul. The vast majority of the forms remain in various types of shrines and receive offerings when deemed necessary.

Ibeji figures are wooden carvings symbolizing deceased twins of the Yoruba. An account by an early explorer noted their significance in 1830.

Many women with little wooden figures on their heads passed in the course of the morning, mothers who, having lost a child, carry imitations of them about their persons for an indefinite time as a symbol of mourning. None could be induced to part with these affectionate little memorials (Thompson, 1971: Ch 13/1).

Mothers decorate the figures with camwood powder (*osun*), beads and/or cowrie shells. They generally keep them in their sleeping rooms or on family altars, and when dancing at the market place carry them tucked in their wrappers if choosing to be distinguished as mothers of twins (Houlberg, 1973:22). Deceased twins must be honored for if neglected, the surviving twin may be lured to the spirit world by the former. Honor is also given to them to deter sickness, death and barrenness (Houlberg, 1973:23). Thompson notes the existence of memorial twin figures among Yoruba neighbors such as the Fon, Kaiama and Ewe (Thompson, 1973: Ch 13/1). Other artistic forms are used ceremoniously in relation to ancestral honor and other occasions. One is the camwood box of the Bakuba (Zaire) (II B, 16,17). It is used to hold camwood, a reddish powder worn during various ceremonies including puberty and funerals. Such boxes are decorative and have a lid incised with patterns or symbolic "commentaries on cultural and social life . . . even puns" (Vansina, 1978:214). Vansina additionally points out that traditionally Bushongo women produce camwood-paste sculptures which were used in connection with funeral ceremonies.

These were given away at funerals; some were broken up and used as an ointment to rub a mourner's body. The most remarkable were treasured and were again given away at a later funeral. This art was linked to the patriciate and the destruction of the objects after a short or a long period was directly related to prestige. A sculpted art created by women, most of the objects were slabs ornamented with decorative patterns. Some were sculptures in the round, showing little heads, lizards, knives, animals, and even a canoe containing women and their boxes. Clearly some of the talented women expressed their aesthetic impulses by this means (Vansina, 1978:219).

Vansina also points out that these boxes may be used to maintain jewelry.

Worship, whether related to myths, heroes, deities, twins, ancestors, etc., is eminent in indigenous African society and takes its form according to prescribed specifications which meet particular social needs.

Social Control

The most unhappy moment in my life was the time my only daughter died while in the fattening room after three days' fever. The most interesting thing that happened to me was when my son became a full member of both the Ekpo and the Ekpe societies. That day I was well dressed in a traditional way. While my son entertained the men, I was busy entertaining the women who later appointed me the first woman of the village to be a woman member in "Ekpo" society. Since that year, I knew all the secrets about "Ekpo" and how it can be arranged, but it was a confidential matter except to all women and men who are members (Andreski, 1970:183).

Social control traditionally is maintained by men. Such control is through "secret societies" some of the most prominent being *Ekpo* (Ejagham and Efik from the Cross River area of Nigeria/Cameroon. *Mmwo* (Ibo—Nigeria) *Poru* (Dan/Ngere—Ivory Coast/Liberia) and extensively along the West Coast among such people as the Senufo (Ivory Coast) and Mende (Sierra Leone). In Zaire, the *Bwame* (Lega—Zaire) is an example. Generally accepted is the notion that the given organization totally excludes females who have their own societies with ascribed social responsibilities. Scholars have shown that females play significant roles in these societies and elderly women, in fact do become members and or exert a certain degree of power to influence activities of the societies. Ekpo more recently has allowed women to join. "Women who have distinguished themselves in their communities are invited to purchase membership" (Ekpo, 1978:75). *Mmwo* (Anam) "formerly admit one or two old women in each village to the society . . ." (Boston, 1960:55). Reasons and degrees of participation vary and certainly the women do not have the power of males, yet there is some knowledge of so-called secrets and an element of

social influence. Women, in fact, provide support of masking customs without which it would not continue (Boston, 1960:56). Poro among the Senufo is influenced particularly by elderly women who belong to the female Sandogo society. Glaze notes Sandogo members' peripheral presence during a Poro funeral ceremony and points out the following:

. . . it is the very presence of these Sandogo leaders that both validates and adds power to the ritual itself. Poro and Sandogo work together to meet problems and to ensure the continuity of the group; however, in the Senufo system, women are ultimately more responsible than men for seeking the goodwill and blessings of the supernatural world—the Deity, the Ancestors, and the bush spirits. (Glaze, 1975:27).

Early accounts relate women's involvement in spiritual and practical matters. Upon the death of an Efik chief (head of Ekpo) for example, it has been reported that

The Egbo flees the town, as he is supposed to do after such an event, should the surviving members fail to catch and bring him back in triumph, they are forced to enlist the service of an ancient woman who must belong to one of the ruling families. At her call the spirit usually returns, although he has refused to pay attention to summons of any man. (Talbot, 1915:193)

Protective spirits for numerous secret societies further establish linkages between female and male relationships. Poro of Liberia/Ivory Coast calls upon mother goddess, *Dea* for protection (in the style of Illus. 8). Among the Senufo the Poro's (Kufuru area) Ancient Mother (Maleeo or Katyeleeo) has her home in the precincts of the *sinzinga* or "sacred grove" which is "the very nexus of divine and temporal authority in the Senufo village." Maleeo or Katyeleeo who protects and nourishes the community is an aspect of the bipartite deity, Kolotyoloo being the other aspect. (Glaze, 1975:29).

Sandogo (Senufo), Sande (Mende), Ebre (Ekfi) Mawungu (Pangwe), are but a few of the female associations who exert social influence. Ebre, for example, exerts authority over young women.

When a woman misbehaves, she is ridiculed in very appropriate fascinating songs specially composed to suit the occasion and she is paraded through the streets in shame. (Majasan, 1976:26)

Art forms associated with societies named above make historic cultural and/or mythological reference to female-male interrelationship of secret societies. Already mentioned is the smooth monochromatic dark facial mask of the Poro (Dan) which captures serenity and feminine beauty. Another to mention is the *Agbogho* of the *Mmwo* society (Ibo) which portrays the purity of young maidens and renders beauty that includes elaborate female hairstyles incorporating combs and mirrors. Whiteness aligns her with the spiritual world and contrasted with red and black details of lips and eyes, clearly depicts an aesthetically powerful form. They appear in funerary ceremonies of deceased *Mmwo* members and initiation celebrations. (Illus. 10).

Ekpo has female masks among its entourage of forms. These masks are headcrests of young women "complete with coiffure" (Nicklin, 1974:11). Masks of this area are unique in that many of them are covered with skin (antelope) which causes them to have characteristics of stark realism, particularly with the addition of teeth and tattooing which "appear to represent face painting of the type worn by fatting-house girls among the Ekoi to this day." (Nicklin, 1974:13). Such headcrests were worn in ceremonies related to funerals, initiations, and war (III, 3).

Talbot provides information about the involvement of female secret societies in ethnic wars. *Ibibio* women, for example, were sent out as scouts in search of enemies for women were not killed. This could be associated with inter-ethnic respect for women within given regions, or with the idea of man killing women as being a cowardly act. *Pangwe's* (Gabon) women's society, (*Mawungu*), performed ceremonies in which women dressed in male attire while their men were out to war. The leader carried gun in hand and sword girded. (Talbot, 1915:191) The relationship here is sympathetic magic which exists in a number of other ethnic groups with similar practices.

What has yet to be mentioned is the *Gelede* cult of the Yoruba in Nigeria. *Gelede's* primary concern is with control of witches who are often thought of as elderly women or "mothers". Through ritualistic appeasement, benevolent forces of witches remain with the society. Males and elderly women belong to the *Gelede*. The men perform in ceremonies which are critiqued by the women and particularly by the female leader, *iyalase* (Babalola in Drewal and Drewal, 1975:36). Both sexes are represented by masqueraders who assume diverse roles. Performances emphasize revelations of beauty, power, pride and humor. (Drewal and Drewal, 1975:36-45). *Efe/Gelede* are ceremonial performances of the night which generally occur with the beginning of the new agricultural season between March and May (Drewal, 1974:26). Songs in these performances voice "hopes, desires, beliefs, and practices of the community." They serve multiple functions including honor of certain females and associated deities, honor of ancestral and living mothers; maintaining community equilibrium, funeral commemoration, education, artistic involvement, and entertainment. *Efe* songs express spiritual power known as *ase* which refers to

vital force, energy, mystical power as a potential which is present in all life in varying amounts and differing manifestations. The deities and the ancestors possess powerful *ase*. The living, according to age and wisdom, also have and utilize this force. Females in particular, whether deified, ancestral, or living (collectively referred to as mothers), are believed to possess a special *ase* which can manifest itself either positively or negatively to affect individuals and communities. (Drewal, 1974:26-29+).

Gelede masks appear in dramatic and colorful ceremonies. Human and animal forms interlock in symbolic harmony. The *Gelede* mask pictured (Illus. 9) renders the bird motif which is associated with witches. Ethnic markings, almond shaped eyes, flared nostrils, protruding lips, and stylized facial naturalism portray the characteristic Yoruba style, evoking a sense of power, beauty and mystery.

Similar mysticism occurs within the *Yassi* society which is the healing organization of the Mende. Members are women who possess special knowledge and healing powers who concern themselves with controlling sickness and other ills within the community. Within their paraphernalia, there exists a wooden female figure, the *Minerah*, which aids in summoning vital forces during healing rituals. Maintaining the aesthetic sensibility of the Mende, *Minerah* closely assigns the style of the Bundu mask. It, however, represents the entire body with attributes of stoutness, elongated fat-ringed neck, elaborate hairstyle, qualities which capture a sense of calm and power. (III, 12)

Magical

Communalism exists with an expressed requirement that its members work and socialize in harmony. Disharmonies are brought to the attention of particular segments or individuals of authority who act upon them to return society to a unified state of existence. In Africa, ancestors, chiefs, spiritual cults, secret societies, etc. are specialized organizations or individuals equipped to resolve certain disharmonies and this exhibition provides some insight into specific institutions, their practices, related thinking, and associated artistic production which encourages harmonious living. It is apparent that much of the problem-solving process is deeply engrained within the cultural fabric of spiritual or religious ideology. Such religious concern which calls upon force in the universe to accept sacrifice, praise, worship, and requests may be viewed as having magical underpinnings, particularly to one who is not part of that culture. However, there are structures in African societies which are universally accepted as magical. Such structures involve priests, diviners, "witches", etc. who employ implements, magical substances, and incantations to invoke spirits to deter or cause evil, depending upon the nature of the request. Art forms associated with such rites are often referred to as fetishes and are particularly common in the Congo. Images vary but include females, males, animals and abstract symbolic forms. They are often created for particular individuals, yet some societies have fetishes which serve the matrix of the community Bakongo, for example. Hottot defines a fetish as follows:

A fetish is personal property, and its specific power is kept secret by its owner, lest an enemy should annihilate it by magic. It would never be stolen, for it would have no positive power to help another person. On the contrary, since it is intended to procure the material welfare of its owner, it would be most likely to bring evil upon the thief. (in Willett 1956:31)

Aesthetically, fetishes generally are of mixed media which combines symbolically various elements of the universe: anthropomorphic forms of man and/or animals, mud, grasses, feathers, cloth, water, blood, herbs, etc. often evoking a human response of power and fear. In the Western Sudan the *boli* of Bambara's Kono society is one example of a fetish. Two other examples, both in the Congo (IV. 1,2) of a female and seemingly a male, represent styles existing in Central Africa.

Both are carved in wood, incorporate mixed media elements, and contain magical substances which are often concealed in cranial and adominal parts.

Functionally, a fetish becomes active after it has been endowed with powers by the appropriate individual and ritual. The following ritual and fragmented incantation of the Bakongo exemplifies its cultural usage. The ritual is related to a sick child. The responsible adult of the child takes a malevolent fetish and places it at a village cross-road with the given incantation.

<i>Mbari nkisi,</i>	Comrade <i>nkisi,</i>
<i>Kuna ku ukwenda,</i>	Wherever you go,
<i>Komba, komba, sesa, sesa!</i>	Clean, clean, sweep, sweep!
<i>Muntu bu kata bila,</i>	Our child is dying.
<i>Yuna ndoki untele;</i>	A wizard has got hold of it;
<i>Uta baka, ukina, uyuluka</i>	He (the wizard) looks friendly, dances, turns round about
 <i>Buna ukwenda, bu lwenda</i>	
<i>kaka</i>	Let him go, thou wilt go with him.
<i>Mwana ngani, mwana</i>	
<i>ngani kwandi</i>	But the child, a child strange to all this.
<i>Nsambila k'udie ko.</i>	I pray do not devour it.
<i>Kuasi, una utala munlu</i>	
<i>ntala zole</i>	But that man, who looks with double looks,
<i>Na kantala kuna disu</i>	He looks with an eye that gives death.
<i>difwa.</i>	
<i>Nda wenda, landa!</i>	Go there, pursue him!
<i>Yuna muntu K'usisi ko,</i>	Don't spare that man, comrade
<i>mbari nkisi,</i>	<i>nkisi,</i>
<i>Go widi kani ku nim'amo</i>	Even if he be of my kindred,
<i>kakala,</i>	
<i>Kakadi ku nsuka kanda,</i>	Or a distant relative,
<i>Landa, kaka!</i>	Pursue (and destroy) him.

Following imprecations, the "elder" brings magical plants related to the fetish and places them on the path which leads to the village. If the enemy approaches and passes over the plants, the fetish "would capture him at once." (Wing 1930:406).

Fetishes maintain their rightful place within indigenous settings. Women, men and children are affected by their usage. Their strength, along with appropriate endowed rituals, lies in their often "grotesque" and "crude" characteristics. Aggressiveness and power are concepts projected, for without such qualities, they would be totally useless.

Concluding Remarks:

The female focus, in part directs attention to numerous possibilities for much more study and critical analysis of African art related to women. It also emphasizes importance of the cultural perspective through which indigenous art evolved.

The masks, ancestor statues and fetishes imbued with religion and magic all correspond to profound common experience. They allow man to enter into contact with the mysterious supernatural forces in order to appeal to their kindness or to appease their wrath. (Cornet 1971:9).

When forms of art are presented with an idea of their contextual usage, their value to the community can be better understood. Additionally, iconographic symbolism can be appreciated as more than mere decoration. The "concept of art for life's sake" (Sieber 1962:8) becomes more than cliché. Female art forms become more than just items of beauty, but objects which reflect life's crucial concerns incorporating the diversity of fertility, education, politics, economics, medicine, war, all related to an aspect of social control which in some way directs woman's and man's destiny.

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Freida High-Wasikhongo
Kweku Andrews

Lenders to the Exhibition

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Dusable Museum of African and Afro-American Art, Chicago, Illinois
Elvehjem Museum of Art, Madison, Wisconsin
Lakeview Museum of Arts and Sciences, Peoria, Illinois
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Mary and Norman Michie
The Ruttenberg Family
Aidan Southall and Christine Obbo
Jan and Claudine Vansina
Crawford and Rebecca Young

Countries/Ethnic Groups



Akua'ba Asante, Ghana

Wood, 10 3/4"
Lakeview Museum of Arts and Sciences,
Peoria, Illinois

The Asante of Ghana produce sculptured forms in diverse media including terracotta, gold, brass and wood. One of the most popular productions is the stylized human form which embodies the Asante ideal of beauty, the *Akua'ba* doll. Displaying the enlarged disc-shaped head, elongated bulbous (fat-ringed) neck and simplified columnar body structure, *Akua'ba* stands posed with facial features delicately rendered in bas relief. Prominent forehead and neck represent desirable life qualities of beauty and health.

Functionally, the *Akua'ba* doll is said to be carried by young girls tucked in waistcloths as Asante women traditionally carry children (Fagg and Plass, 1964:13). It is also carried by expectant mothers who symbolically gaze upon it to encourage the birth of a beautiful and healthy child. (Willett, 1971:112).



Bundu (Sowei)

Mende, Sierra Leone

Wood, 15"
Lakeview Museum of Arts and Sciences
Peoria, Illinois

Although many masks of varying roles throughout Africa convey standardized symbols of feminine beauty, they are worn by and associated with male societies. An exception in both cases is the *Bundu* or *Sowei* mask of the Mende who live in Sierra Leone and adjacent parts of Liberia.

The *Bundu* mask is worn by women of the *Sande* society, one of the oldest and strongest West African female societies which has the responsibil-

ity of educating young girls in adult roles. *Bundu* expresses religious and social values (Richards, 1974:48). One of such expressions is the symbolic synthesis of order and beauty, characterized by the intricately carved elaborate hairstyle, highdomed forehead, fat-ringed neck which is also associated with health and beauty, and smooth dark monochromatic polished surface.



Female Figure (Puppet)

Ibibio, Nigeria

Wood, 33"
The University Museums
Normal, Illinois

Throughout Africa ritual and secular drama in honor of deities, heroes, etc. express social and cultural values of the people. Among the Ibibio, the 'arena theatre' which consists of professional actors, plots with memorized dialogues, rehearsals, etc. provides an added dramatic dimension (Messenger, 1971:208). Performances are conducted by members of the *Ekon* society and its companion association *of:ion*. *Ekon*, the major of the two, is sacred and maintains the responsibility of social control and public amusement which affects the entire community. Masks and figures including puppets are used by both societies to conduct plays which satirically dramatize ethnic standards (Messenger, 1971:209).

The puppet shown reflects beauty and innocence through portrayal of an adolescent girl who has just emerged from *duk mbobo* (fattening house). The girl symbolized has obtained the title *eyen mbobi*, a status which also conveys having undergone clitoridectomy. Heftiness is equivalent to health. *Nko*, (body scarification) on the figure captures the notion of "blameless maidenhood" (Jeffries, 1956:16). Additional desirable traits are rendered through elongated neck and elaborate hairstyle.



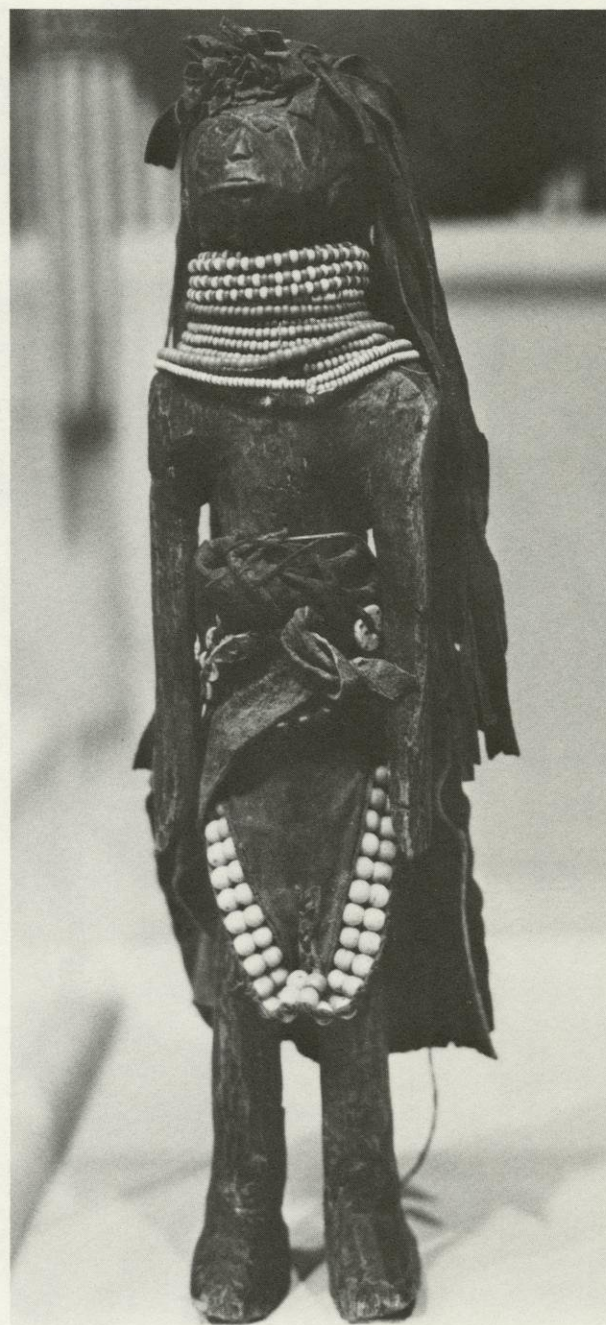
Doll

Turkana, Kenya

Wood, leather, beads, 13"
The University Museums
Normal, Illinois

East Africa is most known in artistic circles for its contribution of beaded ornamentation, leather-works, metal and other forms of body adornments. Holy's map of ethnic groups producing art in East Africa (Holy, 1967:65) indicates that there are very few groups in that area of the continent who have not produced art. Yet scholarly research in the plastic arts is still practically nonexistent.

The figure shown portrays an image of a young Turkana female adorned with body ornamentation. She wears elaborate multi-colored beaded necklaces and a beaded leather apron. Her appearance of simplified angularity bears a roughly finished monochromatic surface. Dolls of this type function as toys and as fertility symbols for young girls of the society (Walker, 1981).



Nimba

Baga, Guinea

Wood, brass 48 1/2"
The University Museums
Normal, Illinois

This massive bust symbolizes *Nimba*, the goddess of fertility for the Baga in the Republic of Guinea. It is carried on the head of the masquerader during ceremonies connected with the *Simo* society. Particularly concerned with increase, *Nimba* brings fertility to women, rice fields and palm groves while also providing protection for pregnant women (Leuzinger, 1972:84).

Raffia drapes the shoulders of *Nimba* within its ceremonial context and completely covers the four-foot body structure while exposing the large cantilevered head and angular breasts. Incised designs and brass tacks adorn the smooth monochromatic surface and accentuate highly stylized human and birdlike characteristics.



Chi Wara

Bambara/Bamana, Mali

Wood, 30"
Lakeview Museum of Arts and Sciences
Peoria, Illinois

Chi Wara or *Tji Wara* has its origins among the Bambara of Mali and symbolizes the antelope which according to Bambara mythology taught the practice of cultivation to mankind.

Always appearing in pairs, male and female, each *Chi Wara* form is attached to a wickerwork cap and costume which completely covers the masquerader. The pair dances rhythmically in fecundity ceremonies which occur before the rainy season and during the dry season when new fields are cleared (Goldwater, 1960:15). Such ceremonies are associated with the *Flan kuru* society, an age grade of men who are responsible for agricultural production within the community.

The delicately rendered female shown is of the vertical style. She is characterized by her elongated simplification and surmounted child as opposed to her male counterpart which displays an elaborate openwork mane.



Shango Shrine Figure

Yoruba, Nigeria

Wood, cowries, 12 5/16"
The University Museums
Normal, Illinois

Within the vast pantheon of deities of the Yoruba there exists a legendary monarch, Shango, who, according to Yoruba narrations was their fourth king. "He was of very wild disposition, fiery temper, and skillful in sleight of hand tricks. He had a habit of emitting fire and smoke out of his mouth . . ." (Johnson in Thompson, 1971: Ch 12/1). According to legend, his power and danger drove him into exile and suicide whereupon his veneration began and included his recognition as the god of thunder.

Devotees of Shango belong to the Shango cult which performs rituals incorporating a range of natural and man-made forms. Shown is a female devotee of Shango in the kneeling position of worship holding *oshe shango* or double blade axes which symbolize the thunderbolt. This figure is a shrine piece adorned with cowries signifying the status of the devotee. Conveying messages of praise and power it displays artistic conventions of the Yoruba, bearing characteristics of almond shaped eyes, flared nostrils, protruding lips and overall stylized naturalism.



Ceremonial Mask

Dan, Liberia

Wood, 9"
The University Museums
Normal, Illinois

Some of the most beautiful masks of Africa are created by the Dan of the northwestern Ivory Coast (Yacuba) and neighboring areas of Liberia (Gio). All are affiliated with the powerful *Poro* society and are ceremoniously worn to maintain social order. Thompson points out that "the Dan seek social control through artistic and philosophic means, through a cult of the masks" (Thompson, 1974:159).

Femininity is often associated with slit eyes and smooth facial rendering whereas masculine masks generally have a more angular appearance, usually a beard, and slit or rounded eyes.

Himmelheber establishes three categories of Dan masks which he identifies by headdress:

"(1) masks crowned with large plumes; these are frightening or imposing masks of social authority charged with peacekeeping duties and fighting fires; (2) masks surmounted by a conical headdress; these are 'beautiful masks,' connected with circumcision, and the teaching of initiates, with their beauty rationalized: 'without the help of women men would not succeed,' . . . (3) masks with cotton wigs, generally correlate with entertainment and fault-finding" (Himmelheber in Thompson, 1974:160).

It is difficult to ascribe the particular role of the Gio mask shown without its headdress and costume. However it appears most characteristic of Himmelheber's second category which also notes the functional changeability of masks: "Manner of representation is, however, no absolute clue to function. Masks can change function when different magic substances are applied" (Himmelheber in Thompson, 1974:159).

Feminine beauty of the Dan is portrayed in the naturalistic oval shape of the face, narrow feminine-type eyes and expressive lips. One field informant noted, "Whenever you see a mask with slitted eyes, you think of a beautiful woman" (Tabman in Thompson, 1974:159).



Gelede Mask

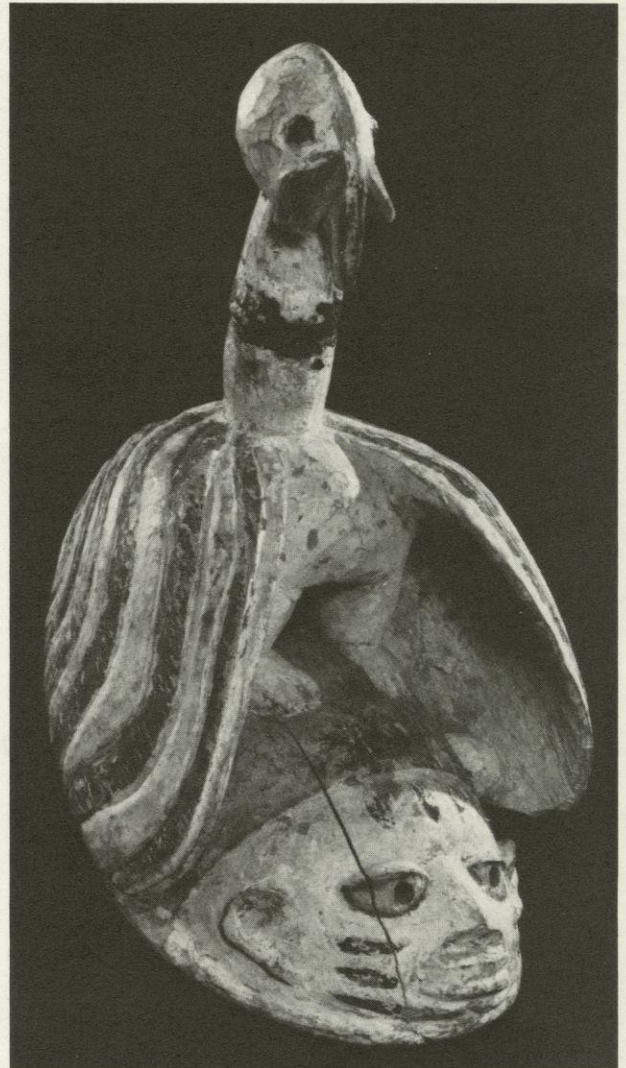
Yoruba, Nigeria

Wood 17 1/2"
Milwaukee Public Museum
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Witchcraft historically has been/is a universal human concern. The Yoruba of southwest Nigeria, has among its many cults one which specifically honors the witches of their ethnic group. Known as *Gelede*, this association consists of elderly women and men, the former being senior members. Lethal powers ". . . are associated with old women. Hence the senior members of *Gelede* are old women, commanding the secrets of the 'mothers' of the night for the benefit of society" (Thompson, 1971:Ch 4/2).

Gelede functions also to honor Yemoja (goddess of river and sea) and Olokun (god of the sea), both of whom are associated with witchcraft. Thompson's research reveals other functions of *Gelede* which include the following: honoring of other associated gods of witchcraft and ". . . devotees of the hot gods as messengers of witches, i.e., followers of thunder, iron, smallpox, and mischief, and Orisha Oko; nocturnal criticism and prophecy; funeral entertainment; commemoration; aesthetic entertainment and creativity" (Thompson, 1971:Ch 14/1).

Masks associated with *Gelede* are worn by men of the *Gelede* society and portray images of both sexes. They may also incorporate other motifs which include people, animals and objects that symbolize traditional ideology and social change. The one shown combines feminine beauty and calm (as do all *Gelede* masks) with the bird motif, symbolizing the relationship between birds and Yemoja who is leader of the birds (Thompson, 1971:Ch 14/3). Ethnic markings, domed forehead, and elaborate headdress or hairstyle are standard characteristics. Surface coloration may be monochromatic or polychromatic.



Agbogho Mmwo

Igbo, Nigeria

Wood, 17 1/2"
The Ruttenberg Family Foundation
Chicago, Illinois

Agbogho Mmwo masks are associated with the male *Mmwo* or *Maw* society of the Igbo in Nigeria and appear at funerary ceremonies. Paulme indicates that they also appear during the rituals related to initiation and the planting of yams (Paulme, 1962:100).

Agbogho Mmwo are worn with elaborate costumes and by middle grade members of the society who perform with movements suggesting activities of women (Willett, 1971:94). Inspiring awe, humor and fear, these masqueraders appear as maidens or adolescents and portray feminine beauty as they "... impersonate ancestral spirits" (Bascom, 1973:64).

Spirituality is symbolized by the calm white facial qualities while female qualities are emphasized by the elaborate hairstyle adorned with mirrors and other decoration.



Mbulu-Ngulu

Bakota or Kuta, Gabon

Wood, brass, 18"
Elvehjem Museum of Art
Madison, Wisconsin

Mixed media sculpture of wood covered by hammered brass and/or copper add to the dimension of African art through its uniqueness in both form and function. A product of the Bakota or Kuta of Gabon, its stylistic uniqueness is characterized by geometric simplification of the human form. Face and hairstyle/headress are represented respectively by ovoid and crescent-shaped treatment. Columnar neck and lozenge-shaped opening complete the figure while embossed designs enhance the rhythmic symmetry of its serene appearance.

The *mbulu-ngulu* is often referred to as a guardian figure. Placed on baskets in family shrines which contain ancestral bones, its presence honors and protects the remains of the deceased. Characteristics pertaining to head formation have often been theorized as distinguishing sex of these figures: concave face representing female and bulging forehead representing male. It has also been noted that such ideas are not substantiated by the Kuta (Anderson in Paulme, 1962:117). Elaborate hairstyles appear in figures with either head formation and do reflect hairstyles of Kuta women (hairstyles similar to Kuta are found among the Mpongwe and other neighboring ethnic groups and are manifested in respective art forms).

It is interesting to note that whether the deceased is male or female the protective *mbulu-ngulu* may display the referred-to female element.



Seated Female Figure

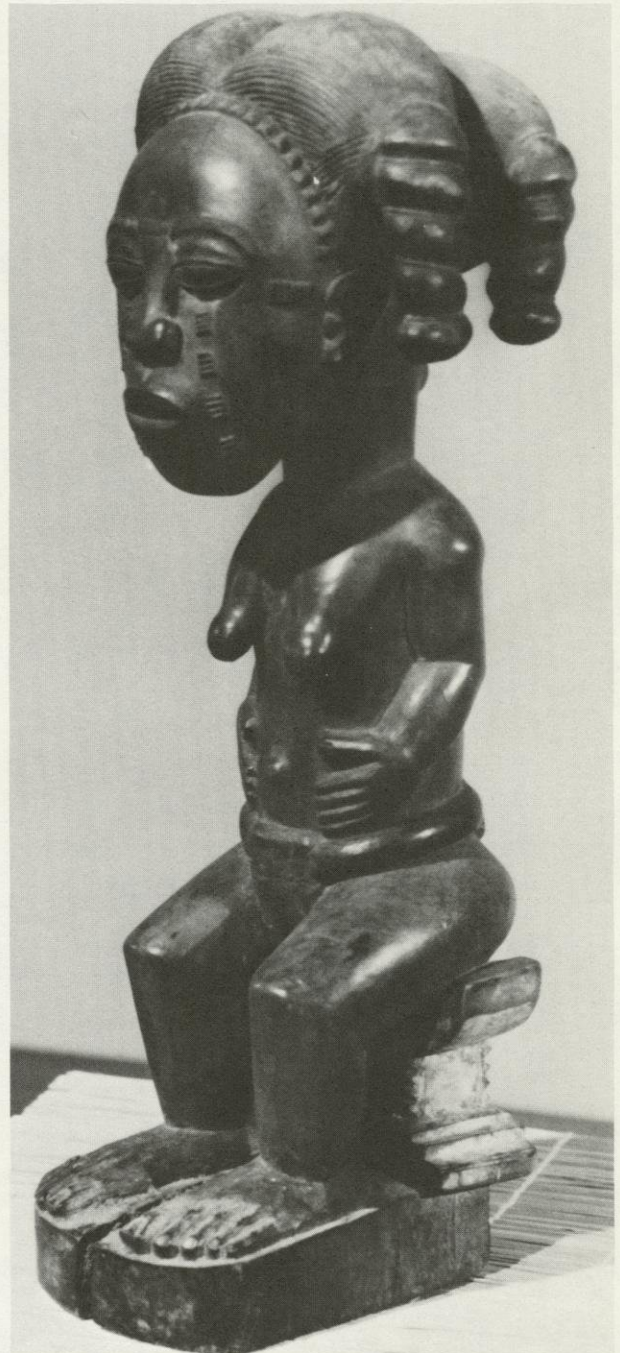
Baule, Ivory Coast

Wood Figure, 16 3/4"
The University Museums
Normal, Illinois

Seated images in African sculpture are associated with privilege and status. Among the matrilineal Akan, standing and seated female and male forms convey power, importance, calm and beauty. Figures of the Baule in the Ivory Coast similar to the seated female shown have been ascribed diverse functions by authorities. According to Wingert, they "are made to contain spirits of the dead, as representatives of gods, and as art objects esteemed for their aesthetic quality alone" (Wingert, 1950:24). Bodgrogi classifies Baule figured sculpture as either toys or representations of ancestors (Bodgrogi, 1968:43).

Thompson notes that the seated individual in traditional Akan sculpture "suggests the power of the throne to absolve disorder" (Thompson, 1974:68). Ancestors, in indigenous African beliefs, command the power to resolve disorder and throughout Africa are symbolically represented to function in related ceremonial rites. Projecting ancestral qualities, the seated female figure portrays strength, dignity and feminine grace. Her naturalistic appearance rests symmetrically composed; manifesting African proportions, scarification, elaborate hairstyle and ornamentation. Historic affiliation with the Asante is evidenced in the Asante stool upon which she is seated. (It might be noted that the Baule settled in their current location during the mid-eighteenth century when they left the Asante under the leadership of Queen Awa Pokou).

William Fagg often mentions a French influence upon Baule production making specific reference to forms produced for trade during the twentieth century (Fagg, 1965:16). This work certainly does not have the "sweetness" and "banality" to which he refers, but does possess a universal aesthetic sense of beauty.



Catalogue

I. Birth/Fertility/Puberty

Forms in this broad category are produced to instill and promote social and cultural mores related to female roles and expectations in traditional African societies.

1. *Akua'ba Fertility Figure*
Ashanti
Ghana
Wood, 10 3/4"
Lakeview Museum
2. *Doll*
Kanuri
Nigeria
Wood, Wax, 9 1/2"
The Ruttenberg Family Foundation
3. *Doll*
Kanuri
Nigeria
Wood, wax, 9 3/4"
The Ruttenberg Family Foundation
4. *Dolls*
Kanuri
Nigeria
Wood, wax, 2" (several)
Collection of Linda Hunter
5. *Doll*
Mossi (Bourzanga Area)
Upper Volta
Wood, 8 7/8"
The University Museums
6. *Doll*
Mossi (Kaya Area)
Upper Volta
Wood, 8 1/2"
The University Museums
7. *Female Figure*
Falasha
Ethiopia
Terracotta, 4 1/2"
Collection of Aidan Southall and Christine Obbo
8. *Female Figure*
Falasha
Ethiopia
Terracotta, 5"
Collection of Aidan Southall and Christine Obbo
9. *Doll*
Samburu
Kenya
Wood, leather, beads, 9"
Milwaukee Public Museum
10. *Doll*
Turkana
Kenya
Wood, leather, string, beads, wire 15 1/2"
Collection of Mary and Norman Michie
11. *Doll*
Turkana
Kenya
Wood, leather, beads, 13"
The University Museums
12. *Bundu mask*
Mende
Sierra Leone
Wood, 15"
Lakeview Museum
13. *Bundu Mask*
Mende
Sierra Leone
Wood, fibers, 15 1/2"
The University Museums
14. *Ekon Fattening-House Puppet*
Ibibio
Nigeria
Wood, 33"
Lakeview Museum
15. *Nimba Headdress*
Baga
Guinea
Wood, Brass, 48 1/2"
The University Museums

II. Worship

A. Mythological/Ancestral

This category includes sculpture which functions in various communal ceremonies related to the worship of mythological and/or historical individuals and animals.

1. *Chi Wara (Female)*
Bambara
Mali
Wood, 30"
Lakeview Museum
2. *Chi Wara (Male)*
Bambara
Mali
Wood, 41 3/4"
The University Museums
3. *Kanaga Mask*
Dogon
Mali
Wood, 39 3/4"
The University Museums
4. *Dogon Ancestral Figure*
Dogon
Mali
Wood, 36"
The Ruttenberg Family Foundation
5. *Granary Door*
Dogon
Mali
Wood, 16 1/2" x 22"
The Ruttenberg Family Foundation
6. *Dance Wand (Oshe Shango)*
Yoruba
Nigeria
Wood, 17 3/4"
University Museums
7. *Dance Wand (Shango)*
Yoruba
Nigeria
Wood, 20 1/2 x 8"
The Ruttenberg Family Foundation
8. *Shango Shrine Figure*
Yoruba
Nigeria
Wood, cowries, 12 5/16"
The University Museums
9. *Ceremonial Mask*
Chokwe
Angola
Wood, cotton fiber, 8 1/4"
Collection of Crawford
and Rebecca Young

II. Worship

B. Ancestral (Clan, family, personal worship)

Portraits, guardian figures and other shrine figures in this division function to portray, protect and/or symbolize family lineage, clans, and/or individuals.

1. *Mother and Child*
Mende
Sierra Leone
Wood, 19 3/4"
Elvehjem Museum of Art
2. *Seated Female Figure*
Baule
Ivory Coast
Wood, 16 3/4"
The University Museums
3. *Female Figure*
Baule
Ivory Coast
Wood, 13 7/8"
The University Museums
4. *Female Figure*
Senufo
Ivory Coast
Wood, 14 1/8"
The University Museums

5. *Ancestor Figure*
Mambila
Cameroun
Wood, 11 3/4"
Milwaukee Public Museum
6. *Ancestor Figure*
Mambila
Cameroun
Wood, 13 1/4"
Milwaukee Public Museum
7. *Ancestral Figure*
Igbo
Nigeria
Wood, 17"
The Ruttenberg Family Foundation
8. *Kneeling Female Figure*
Yoruba
Nigeria
Wood, 15 1/2"
The Milwaukee Public Museum
9. *Kneeling Female Figure*
Yoruba
Nigeria
Wood,
Lakeview Museum
10. *Ibeji*
Yoruba
Nigeria
Wood, 8"
Collection of Edris Makward
11. *Ibeji*
Yoruba
Nigeria
Wood, 12"
Collection of the
The Ruttenberg Family Foundation
12. *Ibeji Twin*
Yoruba
Nigeria
Wood, 11 1/2"
Collection of
Marcia and Herbert Lewis
13. *Ibeji Figure*
Yoruba
Nigeria
Wood, 9 1/2"
Collection of
Kathleen and Paul Beckett
14. *Ibeji Figure*
Yoruba
Nigeria
Wood, 10 1/2"
Collection of
Kathleen and Paul Beckett
15. *Nbulu-Ngulu*
Bakota
Gabon
Wood, brass, 18"
Elvehjem Museum of Art
16. *Cosmetic Box*
Bakuba (Pyaang, Southwest)
Zaire
Wood, 11 1/2"
Collection of
Claudine and Jan Vansina
17. *Cosmetic Box*
Bakuba (Mbeengy, Northwest)
Zaire
Wood, 10 1/2" x 8 1/2"
Collection of
Claudine and Jan Vansina

III. Social Control

Secret Society Associated
(initiation, witchcraft, warfare,
politics, worship, etc.)

Similarly to the other divisions
already mentioned, this is a vast
category and overlapping must be
noted. Included are a wide range of
masks, headdresses, figures, etc.
which are used ceremoniously in
connection with witchcraft, warfare,
politics, worship and other activities
related to some aspect of social con-
trol.

1. *Ceremonial Mask*
Ibibio
Nigeria
Wood, 18"
Lakeview Museum
2. *Gelede Mask*
Gelede Society
Yoruba
Nigeria
Wood, 17 1/2"
Milwaukee Public Museum
3. *Ceremonial Headcrest*
Ekpe Society
Ejagham (Ekoi)
Nigeria
Wood, skin
Lakeview Museum
4. *Agbogho Mmwo*
(Maiden Spirit) Mask
Mmwo Society
Igbo
Nigeria
Wood, mirrors, 17 1/2"
The Ruttenberg Family Foundation
5. *Ceremonial Mask*
Poro Society
Dan
Liberia
Wood, 8 3/4"
The University Museums
6. *Ceremonial Mask*
Poro Society
Dan
Liberia
Wood, 10 3/4"
The University Museums
7. *Ceremonial Mask*
Poro Society
Dan
Wood, fibers, metal, 8"
Ivory Coast
Lakeview Museum
8. *Ma Masks*
Poro Society
Dan
Wood, 4 1/2", 4 1/4", 4 1/2"
Lakeview Museum
9. *Female Figure*
Bwami Society
Lega
Zaire
Ivory, 7 1/8"
Elvehjem Museum of Art
10. *"Po" Ladle*
Dan
Liberia
Wood, 27"
The University Museums
11. *Cultivator Staff*
Senufo
Ivory Coast
Wood, 52"
DuSable Museum of African
and Afro-American Art
12. *Minsereh (Healing Form)*
Yassi Society
Mende
Sierra Leone
Wood, 13 3/4"
Collection of Fred Hayward

IV. Magical

Many African art forms symbolically convey some aspect of spirituality and may generally be associated with the well being of the individual or communal owners. Some, however, are viewed as having the potential to serve their owners through defensive and offensive activities related to fetishism such as the two shown in this category.

1. *Fetish Figure*
Basuku
Zaire
Wood, 8 3/4"
The University Museums
2. *Fetish Figure*
Bayaka
Zaire
Wood, 15 5/8"
The University Museums

