

LEMPERTZ

1798

Art of Africa, the Pacific
and the Americas
31 January 2026
Brussels





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Art of Africa, the Pacific
and the Americas

Brussels 31 January 2026
Lempertz Sale 1284



Lot 44

Preview

Brussels

6 rue du Grand Cerf

Vernissage Wednesday 21 January, 11 am

Brunch Sunday 25 January, 11 am — 4 pm

Thursday 22 — Friday 30 January, 10 am — 6 pm

Selected preview in Cologne, Neumarkt 3

Thursday 15–Saturday 17 January, 10 am — 5 pm

Sale

Brussels

Saturday 31 January 2026

2 pm

The auction will be streamed online. We kindly ask you to place your bids – if possible at least 48 hours prior to the auction – online, by telephone or as an absentee bid. Detailed descriptions, and additional photographs available online.

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Lot 25



Lot 134



1
AN ASHANTI
AKUABA
Ghana
Wood
H 33 cm
Provenance
Ing. Carlo Paccagnini, Milano,
ca. 1920
€ 1,400 – 1,600



2
A DAN-GUÉRÉ MASK
Liberia
Wood, fibers
H 24 cm
Provenance
Private Collection, France
Renaud Vanuxem, Paris
Emmanuel Déhan, Brussels
€ 5,000 – 7,000

3

A FINE BAMANA NGON MASK

Mali
Wood
H 23 cm

Provenance
Pierre Robin, Paris 1982
Private Collection, Brussels

€ 2,500 – 3,500



4

A FANTASTIC IJO MASK

Nigeria
Wood

L 76 cm

Provenance
Old private Collection, Vienna

€ 4,000 – 6,000

This masks represents waterspirits. Often they are hybrid animals like fish and hippopotamus that are part of the people living along the deltas river. The cubistic form of the masks from the Ijo people of the Nigeria river delta is characterized by geometric abstraction, where the facial features and shapes are broken down into angular, fragmented planes. These masks often display a combination of sharp lines and bold shapes, emphasizing the multi-dimensionality and complexity of the human face through a series of overlapping and intersecting geometric forms. The cubism-inspired style enhances the sense of depth and movement, creating a visual effect that encapsulates both spiritual and cultural symbolism.





5

EJAGHAM MASK

Cross River Region, Nigeria

Wood, leather, fibers

H 50 cm

Provenance

Galerie 62, Paris

Collection Liliane & Michel Durand-

Dessert, Paris

Christie's, Paris, June 2018

Exhibitions

"L'Art au futur antérieur. Liliane et Michel Durand-Dessert, un autre regard", Musée de Grenoble, 2004

"Fragments du Vivant: sculptures africaines dans la collection Durand-Dessert", La Monnaie de Paris, 2008

Published

G. Tosatto et G. Viatte, L'Art au futur antérieur, Musée de Grenoble ed., Grenoble, 2004

J.L. Paudrat et ali, Fragments du Vivant: sculptures africaines dans la collection Durand-Dessert, 5 Continents ed., Paris, 2008

€ 26,000 – 32,000

Among the most exuberant and extraordinary African headdresses, this highly realistic skin covered headdress was involved in ceremonies and masquerades during which a young woman showed herself at the apex of her beauty. Extremely rare, this headdress recalls and describes the elaborated hairdo of the young women during the pre-wedding rituals. It this baroque hairstyles, patiently elaborated by kneading palm oil, grease and clay, The masterfully carved hairstyle, with its meticulous order, reflects the morality of the woman represented. Her face, crowned by a high, rounded forehead, is dominated by large eyes whose semi-closed pupils convey serenity and restraint. The last collectors who owned it, Madame and Monsieur Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert, underlined its appeal by saying: "Contrairement à beaucoup de nos autres cimiers Ekoi (Ejagham), celui-ci, qui représente une jeune fille, est empreint d'une grande douceur: l'intériorité de l'expression contraste avec l'exubérance d'une coiffe très architecturale."





6

A LARGE NOK HEAD

Nigeria

Terracotta

H 32 cm

Provenance

Baudoin de Grunne,
Wezemбек-Оппем

Published

Bernard de Grunne

"The Birth of Africa, Nok statuary
in Nigeria", 1998 page 78 fig. 34

€ 3,500 – 4,500



7

AN AKAN HEAD

Ghana

Terracotta

H 25 cm

Provenance

Collection Viscount de Barre
de Comogne c. 1970

€ 1,200 – 1,500



8

A SENUFO FIGURE

Ivory Coast

Wood

H 78 cm

Provenance

Franco Monti, Milan (collected in situ between 1954 and 1960)

Giampiero Gurrechi, Milan (1960)

Maria Carla Pozz, Milan

Private Collection, Milan

Published

"Arte Casa 1963", architecture review

Cf. A figure with similar coiffure is pulished in "L'Art de l'Afrique Noire et "l'epoque negre" de quelques artistes contemporains", by Allemand (Maurice), Musée d'Art et d'Industrie, Saint-Etienne, 1956: #18, (cat.no.28)

€ 18,000 – 25,000

The origin myth of the Senufo revolves around the primordial couple. These sculptures were kept in the sacred enclosure of the Poro, "the most important Senufo society, responsible for social, religious and political affair. The deep respect due to this primordial ancestor is conveyed in the offered lot in the care which has been taken in the carving of the face. The delicate median ridge, the line of which from the waved coiffure into the fine bridge of the nose, highlights the nobility of the ancestor. The half-closed eyes express control and introspection, whilst the mouth, half-opened to reveal the teeth, confers a hieratic expression, showing authority and grandeur. The impressive stature is animated in the alternation of convex and concave lines. The result of this rigor and sculptural control is a majestic representation of the authoritarian presence of the primordial ancestor.



9

A FIGURE IN PRAYER,
DJENNE

Mali
Terracotta
H 27 cm
Provenance
Collection Viscount de Barre de
Comogne, around 1970
From a diplomat, Brussels

€ 2,000 – 2,800

This Djenne terracotta figure, with its hand raised to its mouth, serves as a powerful symbol of introspection and connection to the spiritual realm. This pose encapsulates a profound moment of contemplation, where the figure almost invites viewers to ponder their own emotions and experiences. It transcends mere artistry; it evokes a deep sense of empathy and shared humanity. In many cultures, the gesture of bringing one's hand to the mouth signifies a myriad of emotions, from awe to mourning, and in this case deep reverence.

10

A FIGURE IN PRAYER,
DJENNE

Mali
Terracotta
H 23 cm
Certificate
ASA TL 911.203
Provenance
Collection de Barre de Comogne, ca. 1970
From a diplomat, Brussels

Published
Bernard de Grunne "Djenne, 1000 ans
de sculpture a Mali", Fonds Mercator
2014 fig.100

€ 3,000 – 3,800



THE GIRL FROM KOWNO, 1918

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976)

Woodcut

50.2 x 39 cm

Provenance

Bayer Collection, Waiblingen

Cf. The print, which depicts a stylized portrait of a young woman with the features of a Gabon mask, is held in various museum collections worldwide, such as the Brücke-Museum in Berlin, The Baltimore Museum of Art, and the Nasjonalmuseet in Oslo.

€ 7,000 – 9,000

“The girl from Kowno” (Mädchen aus Kowno) is a 1918 woodcut by German artist Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. It was created as part of the portfolio “Ten Woodcuts by Schmidt-Rottluff” and is a key work of the German Expressionist movement, known for its stark, angular style and link to the inspiration by African Art.

Like many of his contemporaries in the Brücke group, he was influenced by tribal art he saw at the Dresden Museum of Ethnography, which he felt offered a more authentic and pure form of artistic expression. The work is characterized by strong, angular lines and a dramatic contrast between black and white to create an intense expressin



S. Rottluff 1918



12

AN AKAN HEAD

Ghana
Terracotta
H 19 cm

Provenance
Ludwig Brettschneider, Munich
Bayer Collection, Waiblingen

€ 2,800 – 3,500

These heads probably represent the retainers or a generalized portrait of an important elder, either male or female. They were not gravemarkers, but placed either in a sacred grove close or in a shrine or stool room where libations and sacrifices were occasionally offered and rituals were performed.



13

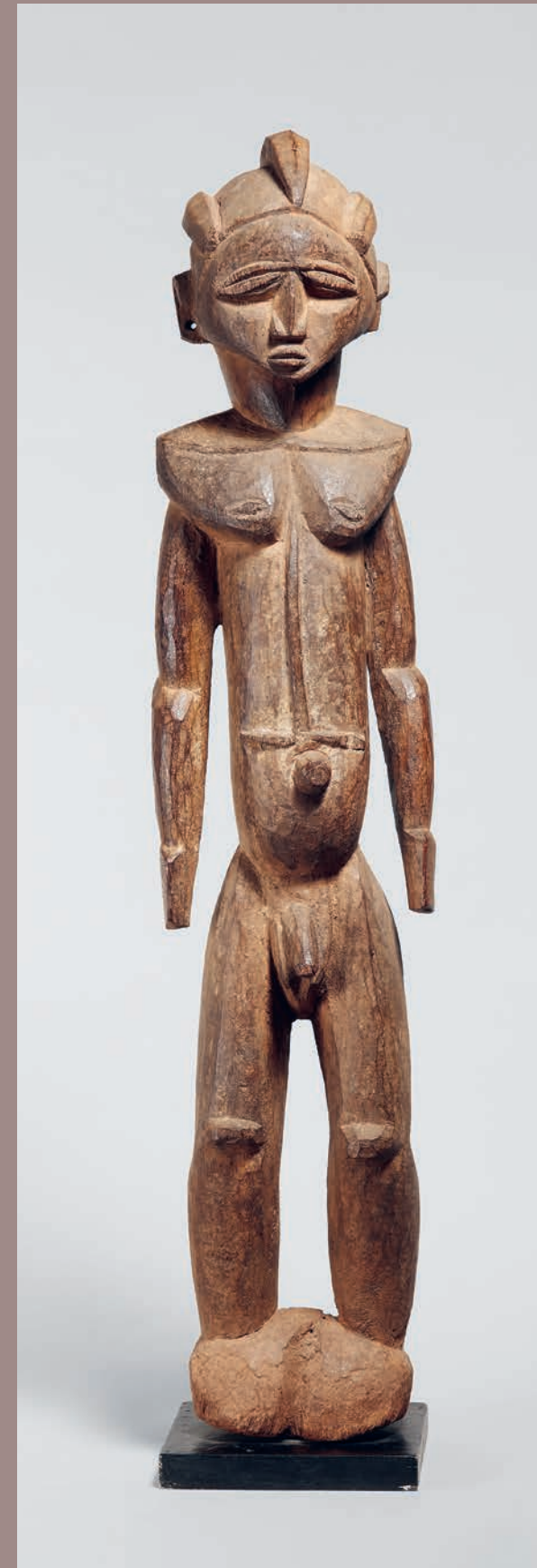
AN AKAN TWIFO HEAD

Ghana
Terracotta
H 18 cm

Provenance
Ludwig Brettschneider, Munich
Bayer Collection, Waiblingen

€ 1,400 – 1,800

These are portraits in terracotta, made among the Akan people of Ghana and they represent the retainers of an important elder, male or female. They were not positioned on a grave, but placed either in a sacred grove close to the cemetery or in a shrine or stool room where libations and sacrifices were occasionally offered and rituals were performed. When the ancestors were forgotten, they were left in nature.



14

A LOBI BATEBA FIGURE

Burkina Fasso
Wood
H 82 cm

Provenance
Walter Kaiser, Waiblingen
Bayer Collection, Waiblingen

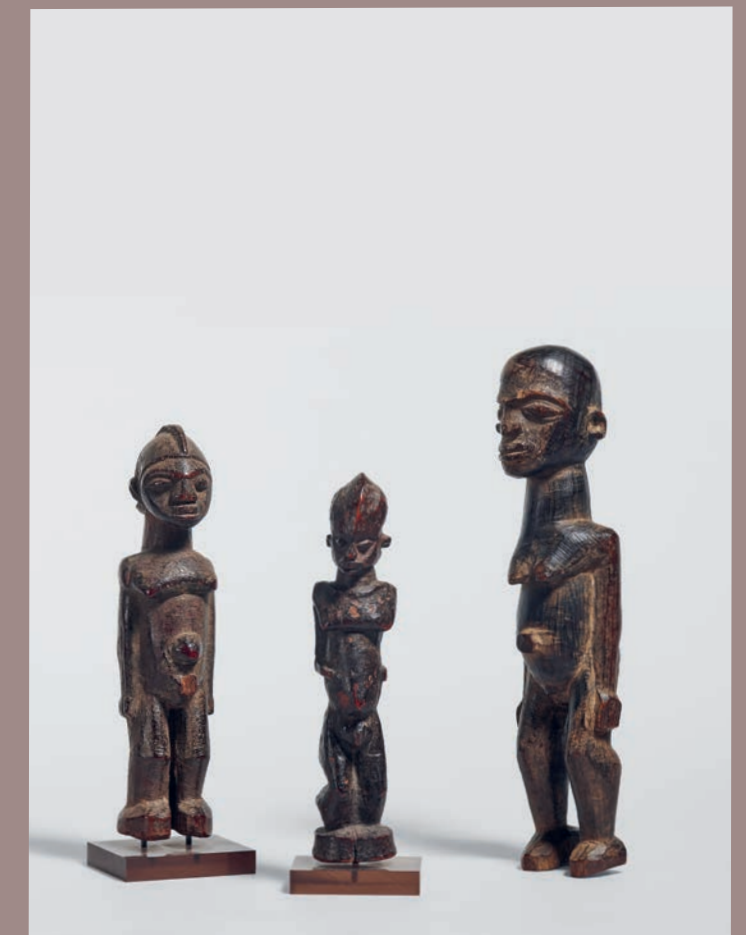
€ 2,500 – 3,500

15

THREE LOBI FIGURES

Burkina Fasso
Wood
H 17, 18, 22 cm

€ 1,200 – 1,600



16

A TELLEM HEADREST

Mali

L 33 cm

€ 2,000 – 2,800

17

A DOGON ROYAL
THRONE “OGO TOUNGO”

Mali

Wood

H 44 cm

Provenance

Lode van Rijn, Amsterdam

Ludwig Brettschneider, Munich

Bayer Collection, Waiblingen

With the original photo from

van Rijn Khepri galleri, Amsterdam

Cf. A similar throne can be found in the Tishman collection published by Susan Vogel in “For Spirits and Kings: African Art from the Paul and Ruth Tishman Collection”, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981:18

€ 3,000 – 4,500

Traditionally, the Ogo toungo is associated with the Hogon, a revered spiritual leader or priest within the Dogon community. The stool is a symbol of authority and wisdom, and it is customarily used during important rituals and ceremonies. When the Hogon sits upon this stool, it signifies his role as a mediator between the people, the ancestral spirits, and the cosmos.

This stool depicts the Dogon belief of the cosmos as two disks forming the sky and earth and connected by a tree. The four pairs of caryatid figures represent the founding ancestors of mankind: the four pairs of nommo twins in their descent from sky (their father) to earth (their mother), spiritual beings involved in the creation of man and culture. The decorative zigzag patterns suggest flowing water; of the path these mythical beings took when they made their descent.





18

AN ARCHAIC DOGON FIGURE WITH CONTAINER

Mali

H 51 cm

Provenance

Khepri van Rijn, Amsterdam 1970

Ludwig Bretschneider, Munchen

Bayer Collection, Waiblingen

€ 5,000 – 7,000

This rare sculpture with a bowl was used for offerings and would hold grains for the rituals and ceremonies. The vessel was kept in the house of a Hogon or spiritual guide in a Dogon community. It was used during an annual ritual known as "goru" to hold the offerings dedicated to Amma the Creator and the ancestors.

19

AN ARCHAIC DOGON FIGURE WITH RAISED ARM

Mali

Wood, sacrificial patina

H 37 cm

Provenance

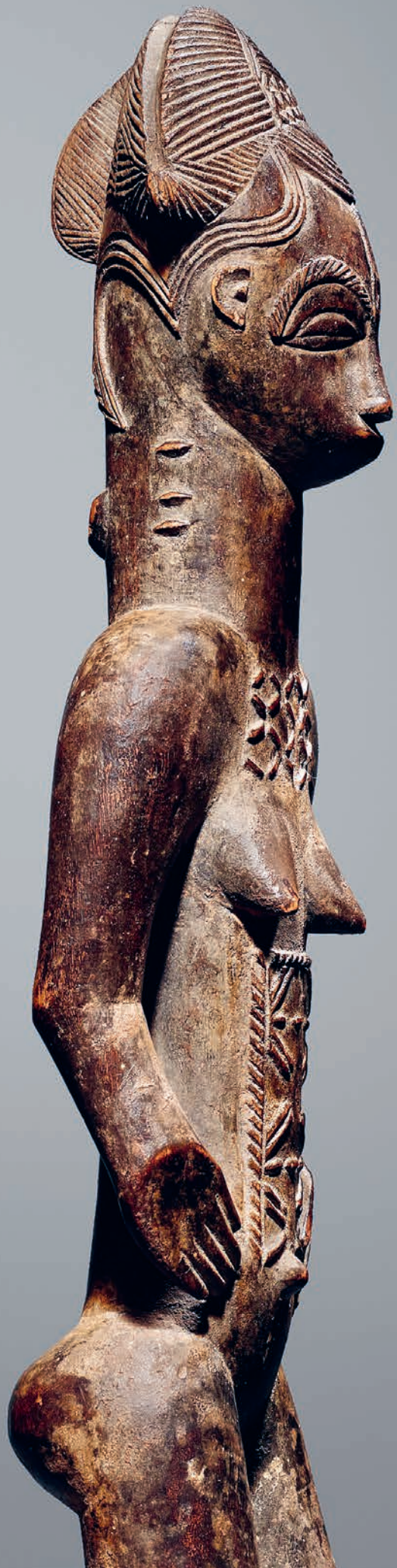
Folkhardt Neidig, Waiblingen

Bayer Collection, Waiblingen

€ 3,500 – 4,500

The most distinctive subject rendered by Dogon sculptures is that of a single figure standing with raised arms. This posture has usually been interpreted as a gesture of prayer – an effort to link earth and heavens – and it has been suggested that it may represent an appeal for rain.





20

A RARE BETE FIGURE WITH MUSEUM NUMBER

Ivory Coast

Wood

H 41 cm

Provenance

Walter Kaiser, Waiblingen

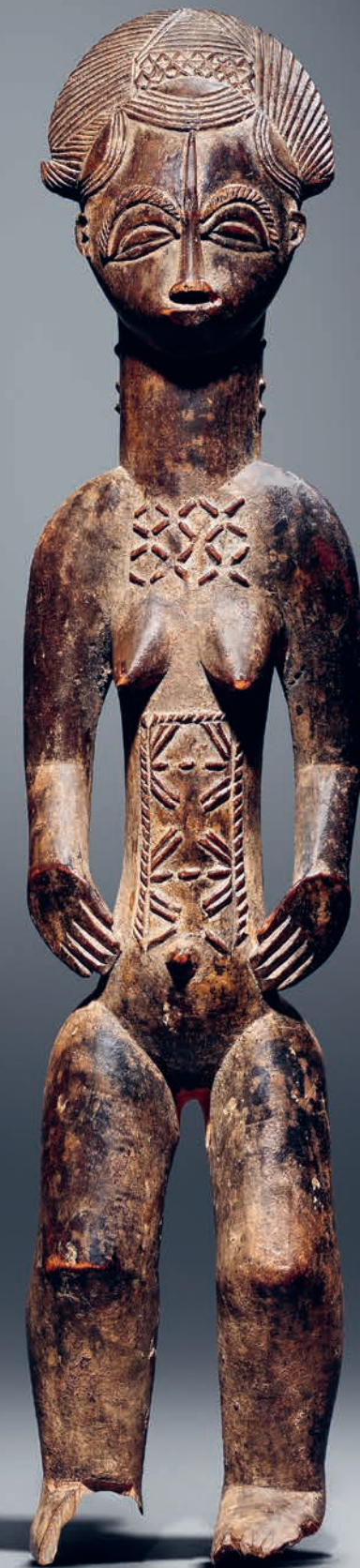
Bayer Collection, Waiblingen

Cf. For a figure with similar scarification
see Musée du quai Branly Inventory
nr 70.2007.66.1

€ 4,000 – 6,000

Bété statuary is, according to Holas, the representation of a revered (grand) mother. This effigy, "the receptacle of the living energy" of the deceased, was kept by her closest relative." Honoring the woman, commemorating her image, her importance, receptacle of the between two worlds, that of the living and the beyond, this work is imbued with a deep, solemn dignity, reinforced by the seated, balanced stature of the figure, whose features suggest quietude, peace and serenity.

Bohumil Théophile Holas, ethnologist and director of the IFAN Museum in Abidjan.; "L'image du monde Bete", Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968:67.



21

A JANUS DOGON FIGURE

Mali
Wood
H 30 cm

Provenance
Peter Werner, Munich
Bayer Collection,
Waiblingen since 1973

€ 2,500 – 3,500



22

A DAN MASK WITH BEARD

Ivory Coast/Liberia
Wood, hair

H 28 cm

Provenance
Walter Kaiser, Waiblingen
Bayer Collection, Waiblingen since 1978

€ 1,600 – 2,400

The Dan commissioned artists to carve masks but also successful old masks were used as long as possible. The identity and contexts of use changed over time. Accordingly, an entertainment mask could have become a revered justice mask.

Seen the great age of this mask, it is likely to have been reinvented in the complexity of the Dan masquerade.





23

A BAULE MASK WITH OLD MUSEUM NUMBER

Ivory Coast

Wood

H 51 cm

Provenance

Bayer Collection, Waiblingen

€ 1,800 – 2,500

An expressive Kpan Pre mask with delicately carved hair and scarifications. Part of the Goli dance ceremony, these masks are usually performed during the funeral of high ranking and respected community members. In the Baule version of the Goli dance, four pairs of masks appear.

24

A MAGNIFICENT BAULE DIGNITARY SWORD WITH FIGURE

Ivory Coast

Bronze, iron

H 59 cm

Provenance

Ludwig Brettschneider, Munich

Bayer Collection, Waiblingen

€ 2,600 – 3,400

This extremely rare Baule sword, used by the important members of the Baule people in the Ivory Coast, serves multiple significant functions both practical and symbolic. Primarily, it acts as a weapon, reflecting the martial status of its owner. The presence of a bronze figure atop the hilt is not merely decorative; it embodies the spiritual and cultural values inherent to Baule society. This figure often represents ancestors or spiritual beings, thereby imbuing the sword with a protective and prestigious quality.

Moreover, the Baule sword functions as a status symbol, signifying the nobleman's rank and social capital within the community. The craftsmanship involved in the sword's creation, particularly the bronze figure, underscores the artistic traditions of the Baule people, demonstrating their expertise in metallurgy and sculpture. Collectively, these elements render the baule sword an important artifact that encapsulates the intersection of art, warfare, and societal hierarchy, reinforcing the nobleman's authority.



AN IMPORTANT BAULE “ASYE USU” DIVINIATION FIGURE

Ivory Coast

Wood, sacrificial patina

H 52 cm

Provenance

Ludwig Bretschneider, Munich

Walter Kaiser, Waiblingen

Collection Bayer, Waiblingen since 1988

With the original Kaiser invoices

€ 60,000 – 80,000

All human depictions with the Baule are called “Waka-Sona”, it literally translates to “wooden being” or “wooden people”.

These statues are created for both aesthetic appreciation and for ritualistic purposes, such as ensuring good harvests or communicating with the spiritual world and they come in two main ritualistic types:

The Blolo bian/bia represents a spiritual spouse, either male (bian) or female (bia).

But much rarer are the Asyè usu figures that evoke an “earth-being” and are used as a medium by diviners to receive revelations. These carvings represent idealized male forms whose grace and beauty in both anatomy and adornment will seduce the spirits and compel them to use the sculptures as their temporary homes. The Baule translation for this sculpture is “stool” because the spirit chooses it as a resting point.

The Metropolitan Museum explains about the Asye Usu; the goal is to create more elaborate and ornamental features, to

show that a lot of dedication has been invested in its execution by the sculptor, and the greater the expense to its owner. The culmination of such efforts hopefully results in the creation of a sculpture that is most attractive to the Asye Usu. When used by Baule diviners, such works not only flatter the Asye Usu but also add to the theatrical spectacle of a public pronouncement of a divinatory revelation. Their aesthetic quality dazzles potential clients with the caliber and sophistication of the instruments associated with a diviner. The beauty of this figure with its elaborate coiffure, the many finely chiseled scarifications and detailed fingers and feet advertises its owner’s success as an intermediary with the spirit world. Consequently, diviners prosper by commissioning superlative figures as divinatory instruments. Ownership of extraordinary objects thus directly affects a diviner’s professional standing and enhances public perception of his or her efficacy.

Of these large figures from the same workshop, only few are known. The Baule figure from Bayer is slightly smaller than the famous Rubin Baule but both are of a monumental scale two of the most refined Baule sculptures known.” A tour de force work with majestic presence, it gives testimony to the highest level of Baule artistry. The upstanding composed posture, strong calves, elaborate beard and coiffure, symmetrical scarification patterns and the serene facial expression incarnate a physical and moral ideal within Baule society. Both figures share the engraved, ridged base, the hands on the abdomen, the fine detailed fingernails and toenails, and were clearly receiving a similar libation.





4 IBEJI FIGURES

Nigeria

Wood, metal

H 20, 21, 24, 25 cm

Provenance

Bayer Collection, Waiblingen

€ 1,800 – 2,500

In the Yoruba belief system, twins hold a unique status due to the region's high incidence of twin births. When one twin dies, the surviving twin is believed to possess the spirit of the deceased, and the ibeji figure serves as a physical representation of this bond. Families commission these figures to honour the memory of the deceased twin and to provide spiritual protection and guidance for the living.

The Ibeji figures are often elaborately dressed and regularly cared for, as they are considered to embody the spirit and essence of the twin. The practice of creating and preserving ibeji figures illustrates the complex interplay between art, spirituality, and social identity within Yoruba culture. In the moment that these figure function, they are fed and handled, creating this deep patina. A next generation of mothers will make new sets of these Ibeji figures.





27

A YORUBA OLUMEYE FIGURE

Nigeria
Wood, sacrificial patina
H 26 cm

Provenance
Ludwig Bretschneider, München
Bayer Collection, Waiblingen.

€ 2,400 – 3,200

Objects of importance after an owner had passed away were sometimes used on altars. Similar to the finely carved Olumeye that is also at this sale, it is a traditional Yoruba vessel specifically designed for the presentation of kola nuts, a significant cultural symbol in Yoruba society.

In Yoruba culture, kola nuts are revered for their role in social interactions and religious rituals. The Olumeye pot

enhances this practice, serving as an elegant means of displaying kola nuts during ceremonies, gatherings, and consultations. The Olumeye itself is often intricately designed, reflecting the artistic prowess of the courts chosen sculptor. The Olumeye are in reference to the kneeling female figure holding the bowl.

The wear and usage, together with the sacrificial patina makes it likely that this cup was used on a divination altar.



28

AN IGBO IZZI MASK

Nigeria
Wood
H 50 cm

Provenance
Ludwig Bretschneider, Munich
Bayer Collection, Waiblingen

€ 3,000 – 4,000

Igbo men wear Mmwo or maiden spirit masks to impersonate, in exaggerated form, the appearance and comportment of real and spirit maidens who appear in groups at annual dry season masquerades. The young men of the society of the “mmwo” honor important deities. They represent the Igbo ideal of female beauty: small, balanced features, elaborate hairstyles, and delicate tattoos. The men who dance agbogho mmwo masks wear colorful, tight-fitting fiber costumes, entertaining the crowd with exaggerated versions of women’s dances.

In the context of spiritual significance, maiden masks serve as conduits between the physical and spiritual realms. Before this was forbidden, they were central to the secret society head hunting ceremonies. During masquerades and festivals, they are worn by men who are believed to embody the spirits of ancestors. This connection highlights the Igbo belief in the continuous presence of ancestral spirits, who guide and protect their descendants.

A VERY FINE YORUBA
OLUMEYE

Nigeria
Wood
H 29 cm

Provenance
Philip Goldman, London
Mia & Loed Van Bussel, Amsterdam
Joaquin Pecci, Brussels
Olivier Castellano, Paris
Private Collection, Belgium

€ 10,000 – 15,000

The Olumeye is a traditional Yoruba vessel specifically designed for the presentation of kola nuts, a significant cultural symbol in Yoruba society. In Yoruba culture, kola nuts are revered for their role in social interactions and religious rituals. The Olumeye pot enhances this practice, serving as an elegant means of displaying kola nuts during ceremonies, gatherings, and consultations. The Olumeye itself is often intricately designed, reflecting the artistic prowess of the courts chosen sculptor. The Olumeye are in reference to the kneeling female figure holding the bowl. The word means “she who brings honor,” and the figure celebrates Yoruba aesthetic ideals of feminine beauty. In this case it is an image of the queen mother depicted as the “Ere Ibeji” the mother goddess.

Moreover, the act of presenting kola nuts from an Olumeye pot signifies respect, hospitality, and community bonding, as it encapsulates the values and traditions that are central to the society. Therefore, the Olumeye pot is not merely a container; it is a central cultural artefact that plays a crucial role in the expression of Yoruba identity and social cohesion.



30

DAGARI

Burkina Fasso

Wood

H 100 cm

€ 9,000 – 12,000



31

A FINE GOLD BAULE “GUILDED” FIGURE

Burkina Fasso

Wood, gold leaf

H 29 cm

Provenance

Collected by the former owner in the region of Yamoussoukro.

Private Collection, Germany

Published

Sotheby's, Paris, “Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie”, 5 December 2007, lot 39.

€ 12,000 – 14,000

A finely carved male figure, called Sika Blawa. It has been gold-leaf covered and would have been used as a prestige object, giving the impression that it was a big ‘solid’ gold object. It was presented by festivals or other important ceremonial events. Representing the spirit of the ancestors, this treasure was only seen at the funeral of the dignitary and remained locked in a chest the rest of the time.

As part of a family treasure passed down through generations, these showpiece figures were carefully guarded by Baule notables.



A VERY IMPORTANT BAULE MBOTUMBO (CYNOCEPHALUS)

Ivory Coast

Wood

H 81 cm

Provenance

Collection Ilia Malichin,
Baden-Baden (1970's)

Exhibitions

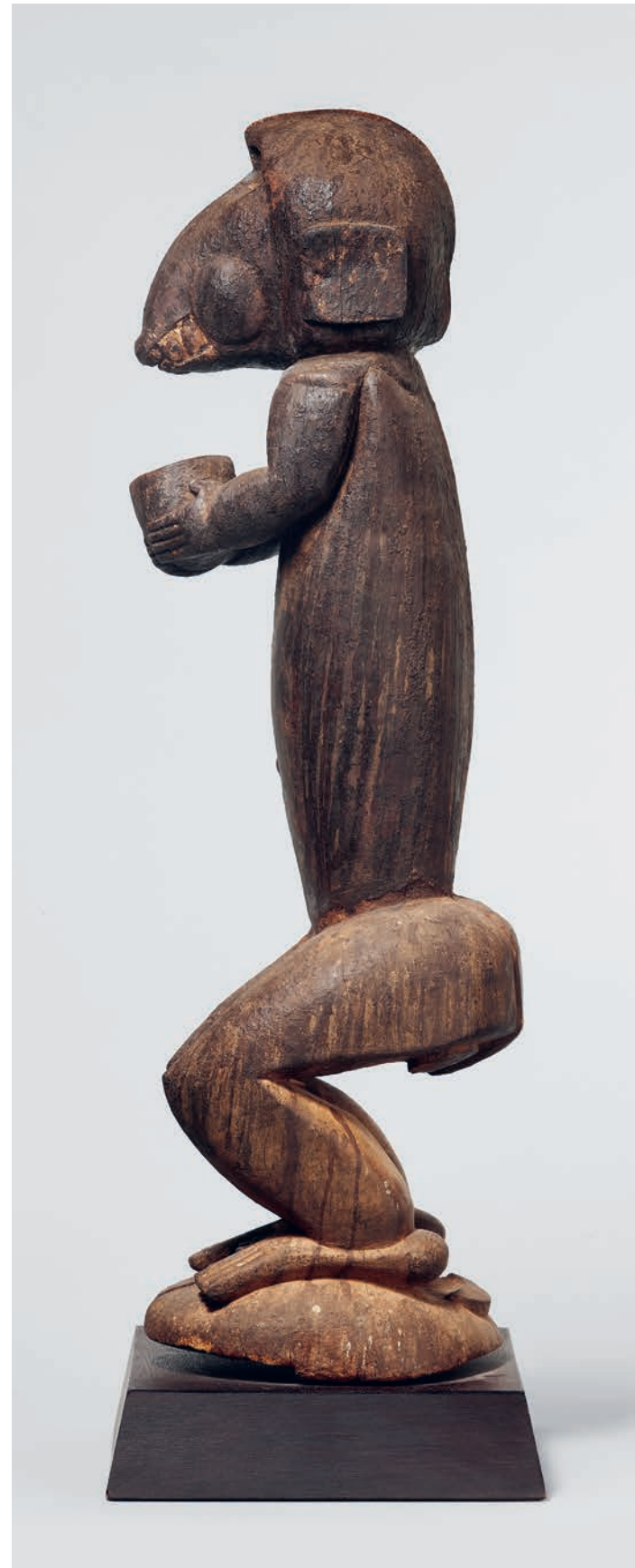
Christie's, Paris, "Arts d'Afrique,
d'Océanie et d'Amérique du Nord",
8 April – 29 June 2020, lot 51

Published

Bruno Claessens and Jean-Louis Danis,
"Baule Monkeys", Brussels: Fonds
Mercator & Africarium, 2016:104, fig. 64

€ 40,000 – 50,000

Among the Baule of Côte d'Ivoire, divination practices rely heavily on sculptural assemblages that mediate between the human and spirit worlds. Simian figures – typically carved in the form of baboons and depicted holding bowls for offerings – serve as conduits through which diviners seek access to supernatural knowledge. These figures are understood to embody bush spirits, beings associated with the forest and characterized by ambivalent, often formidable power. Offerings placed within the bowl are believed to activate or "vitalize" the indwelling spirit, thereby enabling the diviner to communicate with forces beyond the visible realm. Notably, during divination sessions, female mediums are traditionally prohibited from looking directly at the simian figure, a restriction that underscores the object's potency and the ritual protocols governing its use.



AN OLD LOBI FIGURE

Burkina Fasso
Wood
H 45 cm

Provenance
Private Collection, Germany

€ 60,000 – 80,000

The Bateba figure, emblematic of the artistic heritage of the Lobi people, represents a profound entity that radiates solemnity and spiritual significance. Characterized by its sturdy yet introspective posture, the figure embodies a deep spiritual authority,

effectively communicating emotional gravitas. The Bateba serves a critical purpose within the cultural framework of the Lobi, acting as a vital intermediary between humanity and the protective spirits known as Thila. These figures are imbued with an animate

essence, enabling them to fulfill the spiritual commands that protect individuals and communities from harm.

Typically situated within shrines, the Bateba figures play an integral role in spiritual practices, acting as facilitators for the connection between the physical and spiritual realms. Devotees engage in rituals that involve offering substances such as chicken

blood, millet beer, and shea butter to the figure, thereby invoking the benevolence of the spirit world. Such offerings underscore the importance of reciprocity in the relationship between humans and spirits, enhancing the figure's role as an assistant to the Thila.

Although the creation of Bateba figures is theoretically accessible to anyone with a considerable range in style and quality.

While untrained artisans may produce simpler iterations, high-profile commissions necessitate the expertise of master carvers who hold

esteemed positions within the cultural hierarchy. The strong expression of this figure shows highly skilled craftsmanship and skill. The weathered surface of this sculpture signifies their enduring presence in ritualistic and protective rites, illustrating

both the artistic and spiritual evolution associated with the Lobi tradition. Thus, the Bateba figures stand as testaments to the intricate interplay of art, spirituality, and community within the Lobi society.





34

TWO IMPORTANT 19TH C. PALACE POSTS

Cameroun grasslands

Wood, metal label "van Opstal"

H ca. 240 cm

Provenance

German private Collection

€ 3,500 – 4,500

This richly carved door frame with high relief figures is typical of entrances to the former palaces in Cameroon. The lintel would have been halfway the two posts ensuring that people enter the space have to stoop and are thus in a suitably humble position. The carvings on such Grassfields door frames can depict historical events, indicated by the male figures carrying ancestor figures, possibly ceremonial. Lizards and leopards are depicted because of their association with the powers – both positive and negative – of the Kwifoyn Society.



35

A VERY LARGE HEMBA SINGITI FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 72 cm

€ 25,000 – 30,000

Amedeo Modigliani's paintings and sculptures are instantly recognizable for their distinctive style, which was influenced by African and other non-Western art. The facial features that align with this great Singiti include Elongation: Modigliani's faces are famously elongated and oval, with long, slender necks.

Simplified, almond-shaped eyes: the eyes are often reduced to simple, almond-shaped slits or left blank, mirroring the contemplative, less-detailed eyes of the singiti figures.

Long, straight noses: the nose is often depicted as a single, continuous line flowing down from the brow, a feature also observed in Hemba sculpture.

Small, pursed mouths: the mouths are typically small, simple lines or closed features.

The similarities stem from a shared aesthetic preference for abstracted and elongated forms that transcend naturalism to achieve a particular expressive and spiritual ideal.



36

A KOTA-OBAMBA GUARDIAN FIGURE

Gabon

Wood, brass, copper, iron

H 35 cm

Provenance

Ladislav Segy, New York 1976

(Segy Gallery certificate #3938)

Putterman Collection,
Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania

Charles-Hourdé, Paris

Private collection, Paris

Private collection, Milan

€ 14,000 – 18,000

Crafted from wood, a Kota guardian figure is intricately designed with a blend of geometric forms and stylised features. The heads are often disproportionately large, accentuating the face with expressive, elongated eyes and a prominent forehead, suggestive of wisdom and otherworldly insight. The body is brought back to a simple lozenge shape, both adorned with metal elements, such as brass or copper, which are not merely decorative but also serve a ritualistic purpose, symbolising the figure's connection to the spiritual realm.

These figures were traditionally placed within shrines or used during important ceremonies, acting as custodians of the ancestral spirits. Their primary role was to safeguard the community and its members from malevolent forces, ensuring prosperity and well-being. The metallic inlays are particularly noteworthy; they reflect light, adding an ethereal quality that enhances the figure's connection to the divine.

Besides the ritual and historical content, for the renowned expert in African Art Ladislav Segy, there is also an expressive quality to this object. As he writes in his 1958 standard work; "expression is the actual infusion of this Religio-magical faith into the piece of sculpture itself. Here the talent of the individual artis is an instinctive feeling for forms and materials and the result is a high quality work of art which can stand by itself without a cultural background."





37

AN IMPORTANT PENDE PUMBU MASK

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood, fibers
H 83 cm

Provenance
Dutch private Collection

Cf. A very similar mask from the same workshop can be found in the Smithsonian. National Museum of African Art, Washington Inventory nr. 2005-6-476

€ 2,000 – 3,000

The pumbu is considered the most fearful and dangerous of all masks, as it represents the chief's warlike nature. It dances only on rare and terrible occasions determined by divination during epidemics or when famines rage, indicating that ancestors may be unhappy. When pumbu dances, he holds weapons of war as he presents himself before the chief's subordinates to collect tribute. So threatening is pumbu that young men restrain him with cords attached to his waist. Thus pumbu signifies the courage the chief must sometimes summon to confront questions of life and death.

Masks such as this are kept in the chief's ritual house, safe from the elements, and they are routinely repainted before performances, which occur very rarely.

From the same hand is the Tischman collection Phumbu, now in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington of which Pende expert Zoe Strother says that this Phumbu mask was created by one of the best sculptors in Eastern Pende, evident by its great precision, crisp carving style and complexity in design. It would be considered a successful carving by Pende connoisseurs as well.

38

A VERY FINE JANUS YAKA PENDANT

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood
H 16 cm

Provenance
Alex van Opstal, Rhode-St Genese, 1910-1930

Frans Olbrechts, Antwerp
Collection of a Belgian Noble family
Artcurial, Paris, 10 June 2008 lot 168
From a diplomat, Brussels

Published
"Tentoonstelling van Kongo-Kunst",
by Olbrechts (Frans M.) et al.,
Antwerp 1937: #195

Exhibitions
"Tentoonstelling van Kongo-Kunst",
by Olbrechts (Frans M.) et al.,
Antwerp 1937

€ 2,500 – 3,500

This finely carved Yaka figure was in the renowned collection of Alex van Opstal owner of the C.M.B. (Compagnie Maritime Belge)

Each objects from this collection has the reference number of the 1937 exhibition, the first one organised by Frans Olbrechts and one of the first exhibitions on material culture from the Congo.





39

AN IMPORTANT LUBA HEMBA KIBANGO FROM THE NYUNZU WORKSHOP

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Ricinodendron rautanenii, beads, palm oil
H 42 cm

Provenance
Collected in 1900 by a German engineer,
Max Winczewski, 1882–1952
Winczewski worked for GmbH Lenz &
Co building railroads in sub-Saharan
Africa.
Private Collection, Germany
(by descent)

€ 8,000 – 12,000

Luba art's portrayal of beauty has religious and moral significance. For the Luba in particular, the sculpture's beauty and a wealth of accessories, like the one shown here, would draw in desirable spirits. With her hands on her breasts and her heavily lidded eyes closed or gazing downward, the present figure is positioned in a silent gesture of meditative reverence. She is both present in the material world and connected to the world of spirits.

The female form is abundantly represented in the visual arts of the Luba people, whose kingdoms flourished in Central Africa from the 17th to the 19th century. Serving as priestesses, political advisors, ambassadors and of course as wives and mothers, Luba women were important members of society. In addition to these roles, they served as spirit mediums for deceased males. It is believed that only women's bodies were strong enough for this sacred purpose, a woman was selected to be the receptacle of the king's spirit and to inherit his regalia and residence. Thus women's images appear on staffs of office, bow stands, spears and stools as well as headrests.





◀ 40

A LUBA SCEPTER "KIBANGO"

Uruwa region

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 126 cm

Provenance

Collected in 1904, in the Congo by
doctor Mansueto Moriondo (1868–1943)

Pivate Collection, Milano

€ 6,000 – 8,000



41

A MADAGASCAR FIGURE

Wood

H 85 cm

Provenance

From a diplomat, Brussels

€ 1,800 – 2,400

A VERY GOOD
EBONGA STOOL,
NGOMBE PEOPLE

Ubangi region

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, copper

H 32 cm, L 34 cm

Provenance

Belgian private Collection, Antwerp

Gulden snee, Brussels

Annie Deneve, Hamburg

€ 2,800 – 3,500



43

A LULUWA MBULENGA FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 28 cm

Provenance

Jean Batiste Constant Vandewalle
(1894–1986), Antwerp, collected
between 1922–1937

Dr. Felix Lauwers, Antwerp

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Line & Hippoliet Verbeemen,
Bonheiden

Philippe Vanderpoorten,
Antwerp

Isi Janssen, Kalmthout

Patrick Claes, Brussels

Published

Tribal Art Magazine, #43,
Winter 2006:1 (announcement
for Foire des Antiquairs)

Leaflet: 52e Foire des Antiquaires
de Belgique (Tour & Taxis),
19–28 January 2007:#2.
(Darteville)

Exhibitions

Brussels, Belgium: “52e Foire
des Antiquaires de Belgique:
Tour & Taxis”, January 2007

Paris, France: “Parcours des
Mondes 2025”, Saint-Germain-
des-Prés, September 2025

Auctions Native, Brussels,
“African Art and Artefacts
from the Verbeemen Collection”,
2025, Lot 3

€ 2,500 – 3,500



44

AN OLD DAYAK PANEL WITH DRAGON HEADS

Kalimantan, Indonesia

Ulin (Ironwood)

122 by 52 cm

Provenance

Private Collection, Venice

€ 3,000 – 4,000

The Dayak have traded with China for thousands of years and some of the Chinese iconography has been incorporated into their own culture. The Chinese Dragon motif can be found on the very large ritual jars called martaban and are mostly from the Ming period.

These large jars were used for palmwine and after the death of important villagers, as a container of the ancestral bones.



A LARGE IBAN DAYAK “KENYALANG”

Kalimantan, Indonesia

Wood

125 x 220 cm

Provenance

Private Collection, Venice

€ 5,000 – 7,000



Among the Iban, or Sea Dayak, of Sarawak, the hornbill (kenyalang) occupies a central position within the community's cosmology and ritual life, particularly in relation to warfare and collective security. The kenyalang is traditionally regarded as the "bird of war," a designation that underscores its function as both a spiritual guardian and an omen-bearing entity. Wooden carvings of the hornbill, often produced with great technical skill and ceremonial intent, serve not merely as decorative objects but as vessels through which ancestral or transcendent forces may act.

Within Iban belief, these carved kenyalang figures are endowed with the capacity for spiritual mobility. During military expeditions, the spirit associated with the carving was understood to travel ahead of

the war party, reconnoitering the targeted territory and relaying – through dreams, signs, or intuitive insight – knowledge of enemy positions and the broader conditions of the battlefield. This metaphysical form of reconnaissance was seen as essential to ensuring the safety and strategic success. In cases of impending attack, the spirit of the hornbill was believed to perceive hostile forces long before they reached the longhouse. By alerting its owner or the community more broadly, the kenyalang acted as an early-warning system, enabling residents to prepare for or avert confrontation. Thus, the hornbill carving functioned simultaneously as a ritual object, a medium of communication with the spiritual realm, and a crucial instrument in the maintenance of Iban social cohesion and security.

46

A FINE PULAU BATU
ANCESTOR FIGURE

Nias, Indonesia

H 35 cm

Provenance
Private Collection, Venice

€ 7,000 – 8,000



47

A FINE ATAORO
ANCESTOR FIGURE

Ataoro Island, Indonesia

Wood

H 21 cm

Provenance
Private Collection, Venice

€ 7,000 – 8,000



48

A RARE MONUMENTAL TIMOR WOODEN ALTAR

Indonesia

Wood

H 175 cm

Provenance

Old Dutch Collection

Pim Scheele, Amsterdam

€ 6,000 – 8,000

This enormous wooden altar wood have been place in to a round flat stone with a hole carved in the middle. There are a few 19th century engravings known where this kind of altar is depicted but no large wooden altars remain.

The stone is covered with bands of geometric motives, horned anthropomorphic figures and stylised animals. The bird motives goes back to the early bronze age when the people of the centrally place island of Timor would have traded with people from China to Australia. The white sandalwood from Timor was described by the Chinese already in the 14th century.

Timor is mostly known for its exquisite textiles and finely carved ceremonial spoons that also feature intricate designs with bird and human motifs. These spoons are typically crafted from hirn or wood and are decorated with detailed engravings or carvings. The bird represent spiritual messengers and connection to the divine, while human figures often depict ancestors, warriors, or ritual participants, emphasizing the importance of lineage and community in Timorese culture.

These birds connect the heavens or male element of the deities and the earth, the female deities. This altar, served as a ritual object that embody spiritual beliefs and social values, making them both functional and highly symbolic art pieces.



49

AN OLD BATAK MAGICIANS STAFF

Sumatra

Cassia javanica wood, hair, magical substances

H 183 cm

Provenance

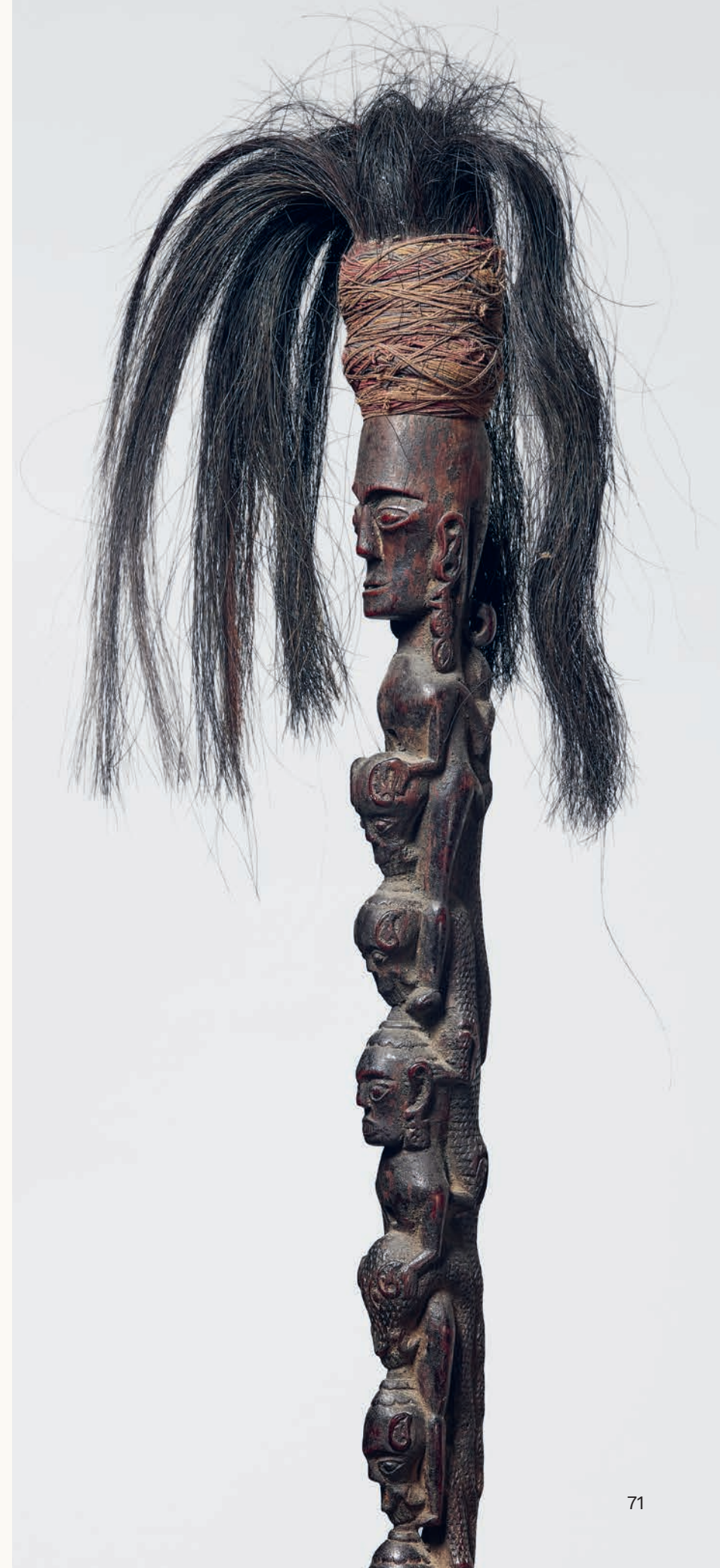
Old Dutch Collection

Pim Scheele, Amsterdam

€ 2,500 – 3,500

Magic wands are among the esthetically most striking and functionally most important works of art produced by the Bataks.

The carving shows human and animal figures, some of them free-standing, others in relief. The head is wound around with red and black thread around a top of human hair. The other end of the staff, which is driven into the ground at ceremonies, is provided with a metal point. It is generally accepted that magic wands originated from the region around the legendary mountain Pusuk Buhit, where the Toba Bataks live, and then spread over the entire Batak territory. According to the legend, the 'tunggal panaluan' originated from the incestuous love of a twin brother and sister: their punishment was to be turned into a tree together with a number of priests, teachers, and animals. This tree stood in the village of the parents of the twins and protected the villagers from every possible kind of danger. In analogy with this tree, priests began to make magic wands which they considered to be endowed with the same supernatural power as that of the original tree. The long smooth part below the figures is noteworthy for the subtle curves of a snake which is pursuing a lizard. Serpent motifs of this kind are almost always to be found on a 'tunggal panaluan'. Before the priest performs a dance with the wand it is customary to make offerings to each of the figures on it.



50

A LARGE TOBA BATAK PANEL WITH FIGURE

Indonesia

Wood

H 101 cm

Provenance
Pim Scheele,
Amsterdam

€ 1,800 – 2,500



51

A VERY RARE HUMBOLDT BAY DRUM

North West New Guinea

Wood, leather

H 63 cm

Provenance
Old Dutch Collection
Pim Scheele, Amsterdam

Cf. Wereldmuseum Amsterdam inventory nr. RV-435-11, The other drum was collected during Van Musschenbroek's stay as Resident of Ternate in the years 1873-1875 and the oldest of the Humboldt Bay objects collected, published: "Art of Northwest New Guinea: from Geelvink Bay, Humboldt Bay, and Lake Sentani", Suzanne Greub, ed., New York: Rizzoli, p. 77, fig. 26

€ 3,000 – 4,000

Only one other similar drum is known, now in the collection of the World Museum in Amsterdam. The hollowed-out drum is hourglass-shaped with a lizard skin stretched over the upper end that serves as the drumhead. The middle section (the cuff) of the drum is decorated with figures carved in relief into the wood.

These figures consist of stylized human or animal figures. The interlocking and overlapping arms and legs form two continuous zigzag bands. The meaning of these figures is unknown but similar stylised human motives can be found on DongSon bronzes. The combination of human and animal can then be referred to as "karkarau," a word that refers to both the human figure and the frog

The band-shaped decoration around the middle of the drum can perhaps be seen as a belt with protective power, analogous to the hip band worn by the chief.

Also important than these relief decorations, however, was the sound, the voice of the drum. As was the case in many areas of New Guinea, the sound of the drums was considered to be the voices of ancestors or mythical beings. According to the people of Humboldt Bay, it was the sound that gave the drum its essential value.





52

A LARGE SHELL RING

Abelam people, New Guinea

Giant clam shell, fibre

H 18 cm

Provenance
Annie de Neve, Hamburg

€ 1,200 – 1,800

Among the Abelam of Papua New Guinea, the yua, or shell rings were fashioned from the hard, alabaster-like shell of the giant clam. They represent the principal form of wealth and a central class of ceremonial valuables. They figure in most major rituals and rites of passage, with specific exchanges tied to life-cycle events: at birth, a ring is given to the child's maternal uncle, who will later assist in guiding the boy through the complex male initiation; at marriage, the groom presents yua to the bride's parents, the number of rings he can offer becoming a lifelong source of pride; and at death, gifts of yua to maternal relatives ease the

passage of the spirit to the afterlife. Shell rings also occupy an integral place in ceremonial life, being displayed during male initiation, the dedication of men's ceremonial houses, and other occasions as tangible symbols of the community's strength and wealth. The rings are so prized that they function as markers of esteem or affection; for example, a man may address another as wuna yua, meaning "my ring."



53

A TUKMAN MASK

Yuo Island, Papua New Guinea

H 48 cm

Provenance
Collection Leo and
Lillian Fortess, Hawaii

€ 6,000 – 8,000



54

A NORTH-WEST ASMAT SHIELD

Indonesian New Guinea

Wood, lime, ochre

H 103 cm

Provenance

Pim Scheele Collection, Amsterdam

€ 2,000 – 3,000

Whilst most men would carve household items, only the gifted of them, called the Wow-Ipits, was allowed to make sacred objects like the Bisj posts.

These particularly talented carvers that were the only men skilled enough to be trusted with the creation of larger, more important objects such as these shields. These carvers were still required to perform all the same hunting and gathering tasks as other Asmat men. Though a man commissioning a carving was expected to provide a carver with food and sometimes tobacco, the bulk of the compensation was in prestige. Within Asmat villages, carvers' styles were recognized and venerated.

55

A SEPIK HOOK FIGURE

Papua New Guinea

Wood

H 132 cm

Provenance

Dr. Scheele, Amsterdam

Published

Eudald Serra "The Art of Papua and New Guinea" 1977 p. 34

€ 4,000 – 6,000

The Iatmul suspension hooks fulfil a dual function, serving both a practical and a ceremonial purpose. The primary function of these objects, suspended from rafters, is to protect foodstuffs and attire from infestation by pests. This is achieved by the utilisation of hook-shaped prongs, which serve to suspend baskets or bags from the rafters. Furthermore, the majority of these images depict ancestral spirits or clan totemic animals, thereby underscoring their profound cultural significance.

It is evident that certain suspension hooks, particularly those depicting "Waken" – the most formidable supernatural entities – also served as sacred images. In the context of significant decision-making, male figures would seek counsel from these spiritual entities within the ceremonial house, offering them chickens or betel nuts. These offerings were then consumed by an attendant who, through the act of ingestion, would enter a trance-like state, thereby facilitating the transmission of the waken's counsel.

The primary function of household suspension hooks was to facilitate communication with spirits regarding matters of lesser importance.



56

A VERY RARE BUKA CANOE PROW FIGURE

Solomon Islands, Bougainville

Wood

H 29 cm

Provenance

Private Collection, Belgium

€ 6,000 – 8,000

On the western islands of New Georgia, Choiseul and Santa Isabel protective figures would be attached to the large tomako (war canoes) on the tall prow so that the figure skimmed the surface as the canoe cut through the water. Being tied to the prow rather meant the figure could be taken inside or exchanged as high-status items and may have been used to adorn several canoes in their lifetimes.

Similar prow figures in Bougainville are probably pre mid-19th century when many practices were stopped.



57

A LARGE NORTH-WEST ASMAT SHIELD

Indonesia New Guinea

Wood, lime, ochre

H 198 cm

Provenance

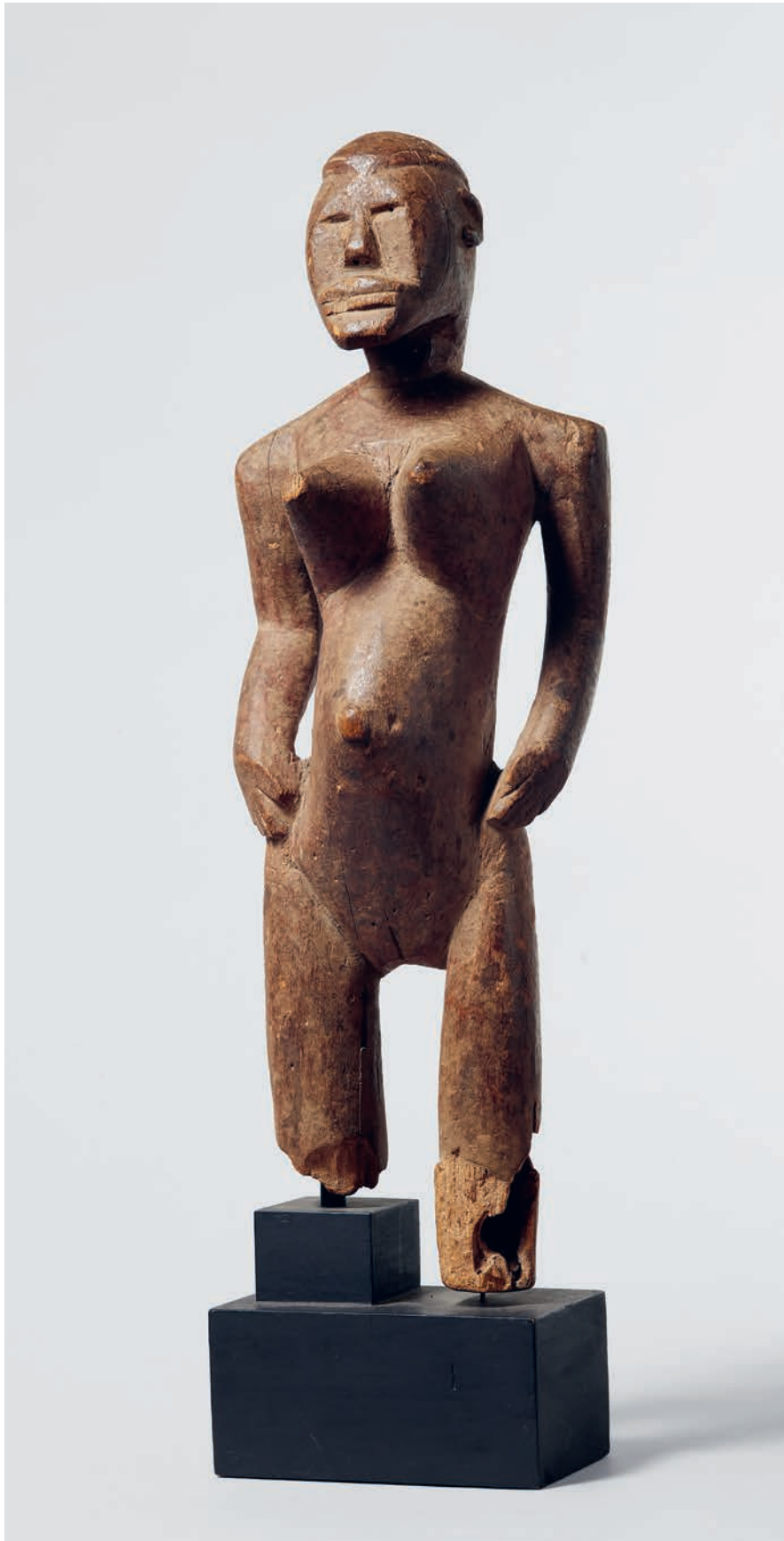
Pim Scheele Collection, Amsterdam

€ 2,000 – 3,000



GRASSI COLLECTION





58

A LARGE TURKA FEMALE FIGURE

Burkina Fasso

Wood

H 47 cm

Provenance

Collection Lucien van de Velde, Antwerp

Prosper De Vriese, Brussels

Grass Collection, Tervuren since 1980

Cf. Another early example can be found in the Rietberg museum (collection number RAf 306) and is published in Leuzinger (Elsy), "Afrikanische Skulpturen/ African Sculptures", Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 1978:70, #27 (as Gouin or Turka)

€ 2,000 – 2,800

The Turka live on the border of the Ivory Coast and Burkina Fasso. They are linguistically more related to the Mossi but share common sculptural elements with the neighbouring Senufo. This powerful cubist female figure is perhaps not as sophisticated as the Senufo counterparts but shows the strength of maternity, a pregnant women in motion with great dynamic quality.



59

A WINIAME MASK

Burkina Fasso

Wood

H 66 cm

Provenance

Galerie Argiles, Paris

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1971

Published

Grassi (Daniele), "Strutture", Milano, Pesce d'oro, 1976 p. 35

Plisnier & Darteville, "Pierre Darteville and tribal art. Memory and continuity" 5 Continents Editions, 2020 p. 140

€ 1,600 – 2,200

The Winye or Winiama call themselves "god's people" and this mask represents "Nikaa", the ancient horned python. The origin myth of this horned mask as it was told by Boudo Obile:

"We are from a family of cave hunters and snake charmers. Our ancestor Lawara was a very powerful hunter. To avoid returning home empty-handed one day, he attacked the sacred python (fire-breathing and master of the air) in the cave of the genies. He rode it and was about to kill it when the genies sent the nikaá mask in exchange for the snake's life".

Like the neighbouring Bobo and Nunuma, the masks of the Winiama mainly depict bush spirits and spiritual beings in zoomorphic forms. The most frequently portrayed animals are antelope, buffalo, warthog, hornbill, hyena and snake. The animal depictions are extremely stylized in form. Winiama spirit animal masks are often so stylized that they resemble no recognizable animals.

Jean-Pierre Jacob, "Les Winye du Centre-Ouest, Burkina Faso", 2022: 24

60

A FINE AKAN NSODIE HEAD

Ghana
Terracotta
H 22 cm

Provenance
Jean Verheyleweghen (1910–1965),
President of the Belgian Royal Society
of Anthropology and Prehistory
Mrs. Widow Jean Verheyleweghen
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1971

€ 2,000 – 3,000

From different regions in Ghana, each of these three heads is a memorial portrait (Nsodie) of an Akan noble or ruler. It is an idealized representation whose serene expression and sophisticated features suggest the positive qualities such rulers are expected to embody.



61

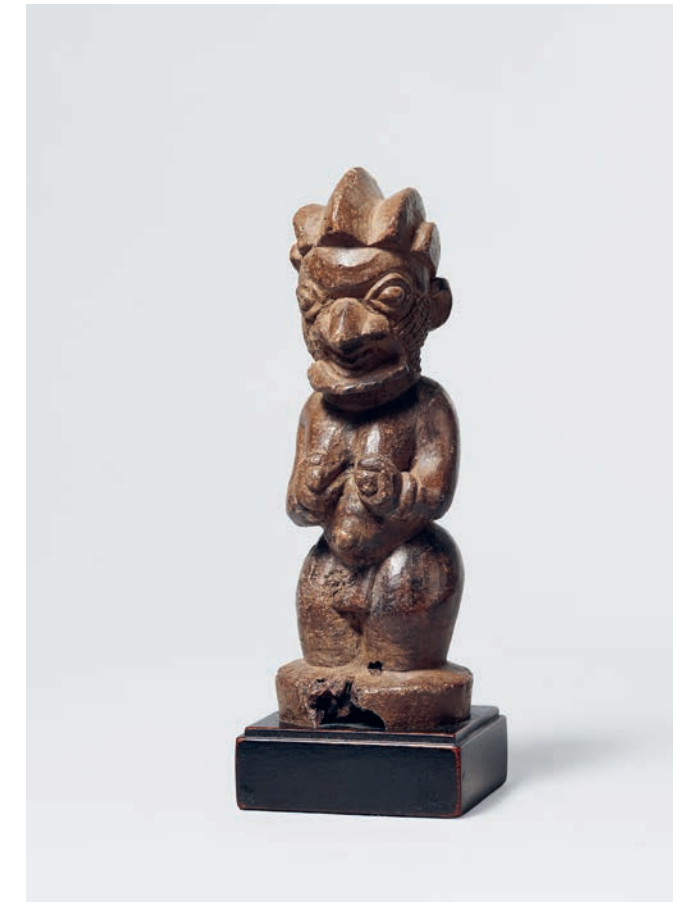
A FINE NOMOLI FIGURE

Sierra Leone
Stone
H 25 cm

Provenance
Patricia Withofs, Brussels
Galerie Dartevelle, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1975

€ 2,000 – 2,600

These stone figures share a stylistic and iconographical identity with many of the Afro-Portuguese ivory carvings being made at that time for the Portuguese royalty. They were probably carved about the sixteenth century. We are not sure about the original function, the nomoli may originally have been ancestor figures but are now put to secondary use as 'rice gods' when they are dug up in the fields.



62

A SAPI FIGURE

Sierra Leone
Stone
H 17 cm

Provenance
Pierre Dartevelle, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1975

€ 1,600 – 2,200



◀ 63

A VERY FINE SAPI NOMOLI FIGURE

Sierra Leone

Stone

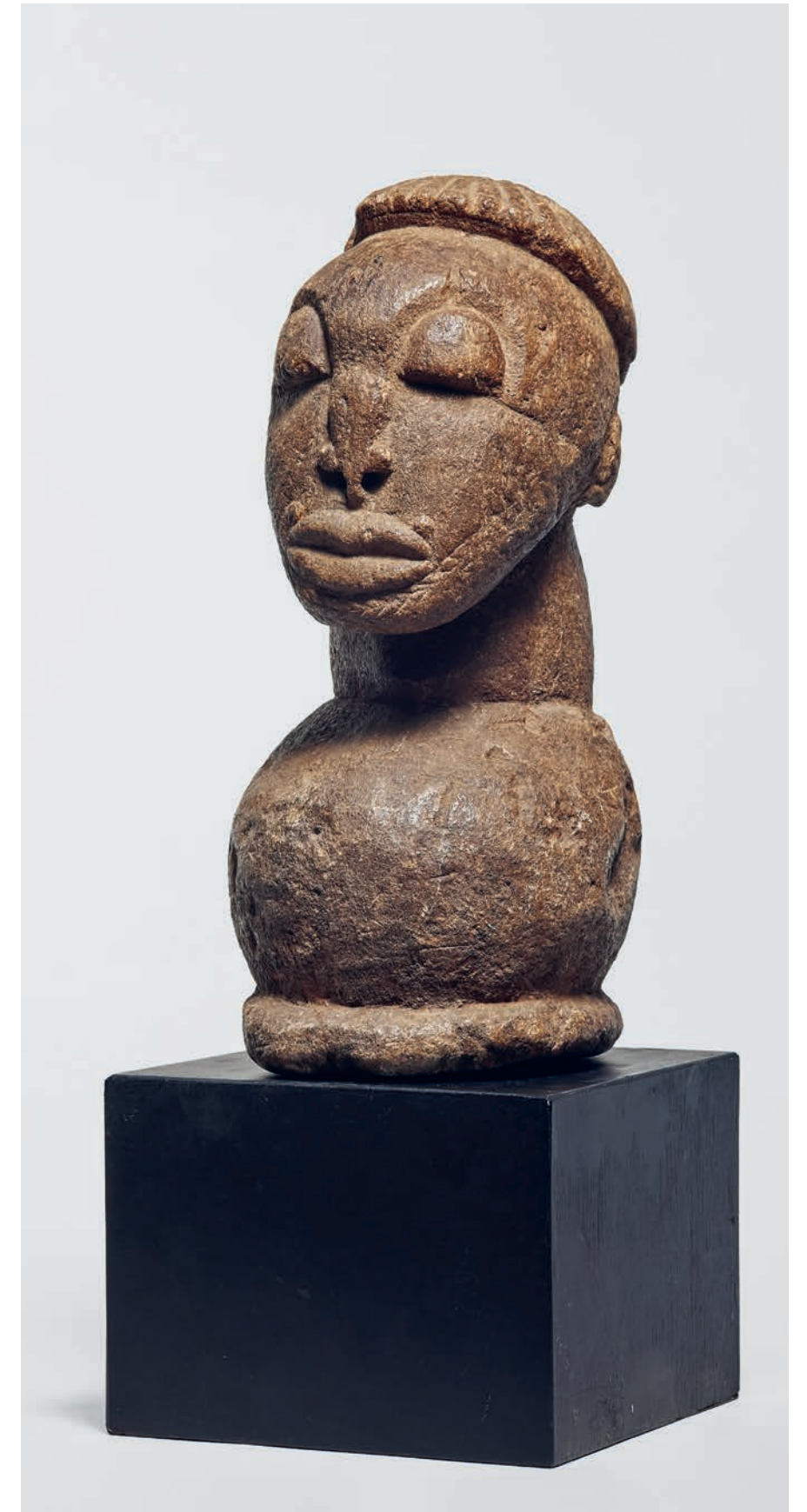
H 12 cm

Provenance

Vittorio Mangio Collection, Monza

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1982

€ 2,500 – 3,500



64

A MAHEN FIGURE

Sierra Leone

Stone

H 27 cm

Provenance

Probably Vittorio Mangion, Monza

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 2,500 – 3,000

AN IMPORTANT MAHEN YAFE HEAD

Sierra Leone

Stone

H 24 cm

Provenance

Vittorio Mangiò, Monza

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1979

Exhibitions

"Utotombo", L'art d'Afrique noire dans les collections privées Belges, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1988, 162, p. 142 #42

Published

Arts d'Afrique Noire, hiver 1986, p. 43

€ 20,000 – 25,000

Farmers in southern and eastern Sierra Leone have discovered many ancient stone carvings buried in the ground, including pedestal heads similar to this one, with a sturdy columnar neck. These heads are from a lost society, referred to by the Mende who live there now, in their own language as Nomoli meaning 'found spirit' (nomolisia, pl.). A small group of the stone heads with pedestal-like necks, no body and nearly life sized are referred to as the Mahen Yafe or 'head of the chief'.

These stone heads usually have elaborate coiffures, as in this case, showing a combination of shaved, tufted, and possibly plaited areas. Similar hair styles are described in early seventeenth-century portugese sources, where they are apparently associated with the Sapi aristocracy.

William Siegmanns article in "Afrikanische kunst", edited by Schmalenbach, Prestel Verlag, 1988.



66

A "CUBIST" DAN MASK

Ivory Coast
Wood, sacrificial lacquer
H 24.5 cm

Provenance
Collection John Lens, Antwerp
Collection Ronny Van de Velde
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1995

Published
Sotheby's London, 28 Nov. 1994, lot 11

€ 2,500 – 3,500

A very expressive and old Dan mask with great expression and deep warm patin.

The specific functions of individual masks, once removed from their contexts, are difficult to determine. Here, the intriguing smile and finely carved features contrast with those of other masks and probably indicate that this example functioned to create harmony in the community.



67

AN ABSTRACT CHIWARA

Mali
Wood
H 48 cm

Provenance
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Published
Zahan: "Les Antilopes du Soleil" p 188,
image 49 II-4

Cf. From the same workshop in the
Collection of Leo Viktor Frobenius
(1873-1939) that he acquired from the
Völkerkundemuseum, Berlin in 1914

€ 1,600 – 2,400

These masks are called Sogoni Koun, mostly referred to by the name of the Chiwara society in which they are used. They are tied to agricultural rites and therefore to the notion of fertility, fecundity and sowing. The myth goes that the antelope were the ancestors that taught humans how to grow crops.

These headdresses, typically worn in pairs, have different uses depending on the village. But they always represent objects of unity and protection for the community, particularly as they can be seen by all, rather than being reserved for a select few.





68

AN EARLY BASSA MASK

Liberia
Wood
H 29 cm

Provenance
Vittorio Mangiò, Monza
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Cf. From the same hand in the National
Museum of African Art, Smithsonian
Washington, Inventory nr. 2005-6-54

€ 2,200 – 2,800

69

A GREAT DAN MASK

Ivory Coast
H 23 cm

Provenance
Egill Jacobsen Collection, Copenhagen
(1967 Paris exhibition number inside)
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Exhibitions
"Arts primitifs dans les ateliers
d'artistes", Paris: Société des Amis du
Musée de l'Homme, 1967

€ 5,000 – 7,000

In Dan society, these human face masks represent dangerous immaterial spirits. Whether or not they are worn, such sculptures are spiritually charged. Once they are separated from their performance contexts, however, these mask forms are difficult to identify.

With its wide circular eyes, this mask can be probably be identified as Gunyege, worn by the community's champion runners.



A COLLECTION OF
13 EARLY "PASSPORT"
MASKS FROM THE
DAN/MANO/BASSA

Liberia

Wood, metal

H 8–14 cm

Provenance

Collected in the field by Vittorio Mangiò,
Monza around 1968

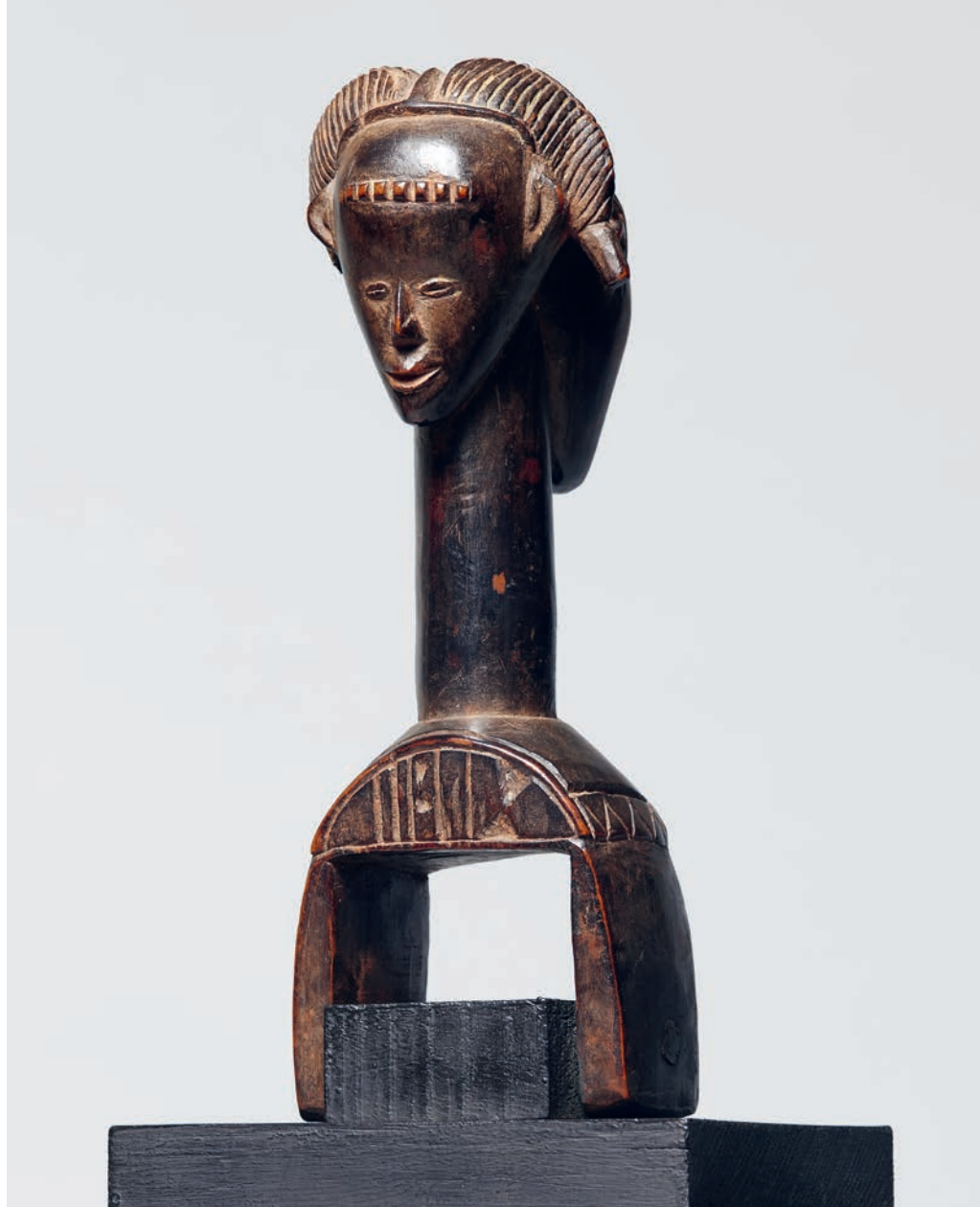
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1975

€ 2,500 – 4,000

This is a great collection of very old and well used Poro passport masks, collected by the expert Vittorio Mangiò.

These miniature masks, sometimes called ma go (literally small head), were miniature copies of family or Poro masks, allowing their owners to retain contact with the spiritual power of their lineage. They were often sewn onto a piece of cloth and carried in a pouch for easy access and secrecy.





71

AN UNUSUAL GURO JANUS PULLEY (KONO)

Ivory Coast

Wood

H 20 cm

Provenance

Edmond Morlet, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1964

Exhibitions

The World Exhibition, Brussels 1958

Published

Daniele Grassi, Struttare, Milan,
Vanni Scheiwiller, 1976 p. 67

€ 3,000 – 4,000

This is one of the first pieces bought by Daniele Grassi the Grassi collection, bought at the gallery of Edmond Morlet who was then famous for organising the African selection at the World Exhibition of 1958 in Brussels.

This is a very unusual Janus pulley with a delicately carved male and female face, showing the balance between male and female (elaborate coiffure) powers and there equality in Guro society. Across the Ivory Coast, heddle pulleys are used on narrow-band loom to ease the movements

of the heddles while separating the warp threads , in that way the shuttle can pass easily. through the layers of thread. These pulleys were often embellished, beautifying the simplest functional object.





72

A FEMALE LOBI FIGURE BATEBA, NAKO REGION

Burkina Faso

Wood

H 58.5 cm

Provenance

Lucien Van de Velde, Antwerp

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1970

Cf. In his "Kunst und religion der Lobi", Piet Meyer shows four sculptures "with glasses". He mentioned that, according to Puguli informants in Gaoua, these sculptures were carved by a Puguli carver.

€ 2,600 – 3,600

A beautiful example of the "Kelkoa" style figures, with the characteristic prominent eyes, justly called the "glasses" style. According to Werner Fisher, the "spectacles" around the eyes are said to reproduce the facial expression of a possessed person.

The Lobi people are an agricultural community with strong spiritual and religious practices. Bateba figures are integral to their religion and are passed down through generations, serving as intermediaries between the human and spirit worlds. A figure like this may be placed in such a shrine to serve as an assistant to these spirit. Devotees spread offerings of chicken blood, millet beer, and shea butter onto the sculpture to ensure the benevolence of the spirit world.



73

A RARE BRONZE HUNTING FETISH, BAMANA OR DAN

Mali/Liberia

Bronze, hair, fibres

H 12 cm

Provenance

Jean Verheylewegen, Antwerp

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Published

Grassi (Daniele), "Strutture", Milano: Vanni pesce d'oro, 1976 p. 9

€ 800 – 1,200

74

A BLOLO BLAN BAULE FIGURE

Ivory Coast

Wood

H 39 cm

Provenance

Collection Lucien Van de Velde, Antwerp

Collection de Vriese, Antwerp

Mark Felix, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1979

€ 2,500 – 3,500



75

A BLOLO BLAN BAULE FIGURE

Ivory Coast

Wood

H 40 cm

Provenance

Jan Dierickx, 1963

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Exhibitions

Tervuren, Belgium: "Art d'Afrique dans les collections belges", Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, 29 June–30 October 1963

Published

Daniele Grassi, Strutture, Milan, Vanni Scheiwiller, 1976 page 13

Lehuard, Raoul, Art d'Afrique Noire 60, (winter 1986) page 41

€ 3,000 – 3,500

W

ooden standing Baule male figure, bearded and with high crested coiffure; on the forehead, neck and body is typical Baule scarification in relief; the arms are carved in high relief with the hands flat on the abdomen.

This carving of the Baule people of the Ivory Coast is of a type sometimes referred to as an 'ancestor figure'. but it actually represents a male spirit lover, blolo bian who would be partnered by a female spirit lover, blolo bla. They are frustrated partners left behind in the world of the spirits when people are born into this world. A woman is believed to have a spirit double or spouse that resides in the other world. If this spirit becomes angry, the human spouse commissions a carving to receive offerings. So women would ask the sculptor to add esthetically pleasing male characteristics, creating a sensitive and well formed man with fine scarifications.





76
A RARE DAN GUERE
FETISH BELL WITH
STYLISED ELEPHANT
TUSKS

Ivory Coast
Bronze
H 11 cm
Provenance
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 1,200 – 1,600



77
A DOGON GRANARY
DOOR LOCK WITH
TWO STYLIZED
FIGURES

Mali
Wood with ancient patina
H 43 cm
Provenance
Prosper De Vriese, Brussels 1980
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 1,000 – 1,400

A fine granary doorlock with the stylised figures on top. Traditionally these were used to secure the wooden granary doors and often served as symbolic gift to a new family.

78
HERMAPHRODITE
DOGON FIGURE, MALI

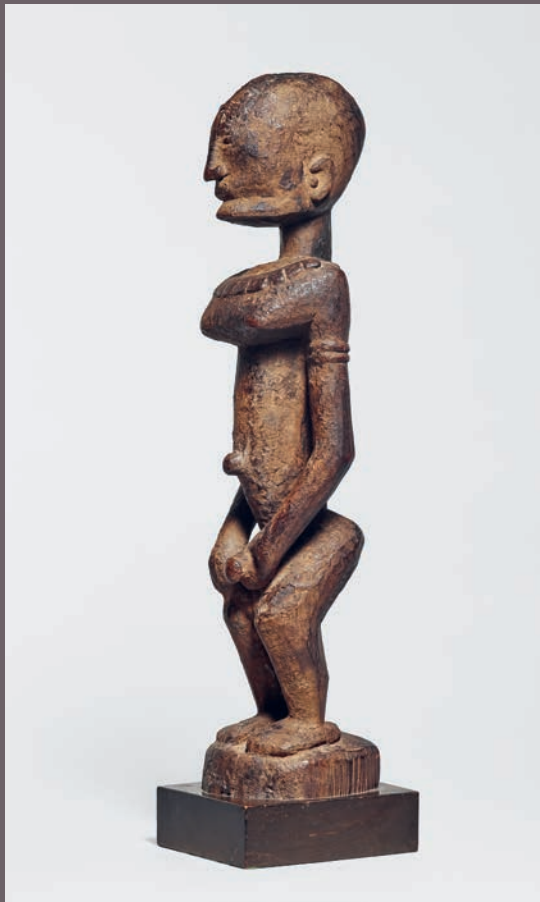
Mali
Wood, sacrificial patina
H 42 cm
Provenance
Sablon gallery, 1966
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 3,000 – 4,000

The most distinctive subject rendered by Dogon sculptures is that of a single figure standing with raised arms. This posture has usually been interpreted as a gesture of prayer – an effort to link earth and heavens – and it has been suggested that it may represent an appeal for rain. This wonderful piece of Dogon abstract art depicts a man with a well-modeled body in a half seated stance.

Within the Dogon society, sculptures that were used to petition higher powers were made by the highly regarded and feared blacksmiths. In each community, there would be one or two families specialised in forging. This archaic wooden sculpture with thick libation feels like a forged sculptural work, produced in cast metal rather than carved wood, emphasizing a graphic, angular almost cubic force.





79

A RARE DOGON N'DULERI MYTHICAL FIGURE

Mali

Wood, old sacrificial patina

H 54 cm

Provenance

Gulden Snee Gallery

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1976

Published

Daniele Grassi, *Strutture*, Vanni Scheiwiller Editore, Milan 1976, p. 83

Cf. By the same hand in the BMA Birmingham, Alabama Inventory nr. 1987.39 for further reading: Bernard de Grunne, "Ancient Sculpture of the Inland Niger Delta and its Influence on Dogon Art", *African Arts*, vol. 21, no. 4, August 1988, pp. 50–55

€ 28,000 – 35,000

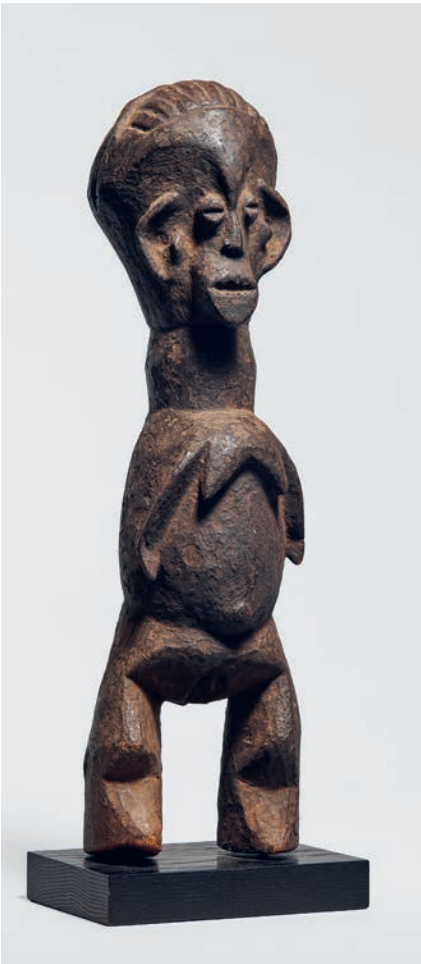
N'duleri is a region within the Dogon culture of Mali, known for its distinct sculptural style. Among the various types of ancestors worshiped are the original ancestors of mankind and the various Binu or ancestors who lived in mythic times, turned immortal and eventually revered by an entire clan. His stylized beard identifies him as an elder and an individual whose age and experience entitle him to participate in the most important religious, political, and social affairs of Dogon society. The figure wears wristlets, armlets, and anklets that indicate his status, as well as a belt and neck pendants resembling leather talismans that also suggest his spiritual importance and link to the myth of Nommo.

This mythical link is often the primordial figure of Nommo, the first living person created by Amma the creator of the universe. Among the various types of ancestors worshipped are the original ancestors of mankind and the various binu, ancestors who lived in mythic times, turned immortal and eventually revered by an entire clan. These ancestors are all directly linked to Nommo according to Dogon cosmogony. In fact, one can say that the proliferation of binu and other altars has at its origin the myth of Nommo, his primordial multiplication through twins, his resurrection and sharing of life force.





80
**A CLASSIC DOGON
 FIGURE**
 Mali
 Wood
 H 33 cm
 Provenance
 A gallery on the Sablon, Brussels
 Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1965
 Published
 Daniele Grassi, Strutture, Milano,
 Vanni Scheiwiller, 1976
€ 2,500 – 3,500



81 ▷
**AN OLD BAMANA
 NTOMO MASK**
 Mali
 Wood, Cauri shells, red seeds
 H 60 cm
 Provenance
 Serge Diakonoff, Geneva
 Pierre Darteville, Brussels
 Grassi Collection, Tervuren
€ 4,000 – 5,000

An ancient and expressive Ntomo mask with a surface that shows traces of materials that were added after cutting. It was first blackened with fire, then rubbed with crushed charcoal, before receiving oblations of cream of millet, which notably left traces between the horns. It is an ancient mask, as evidenced by the wear of the inner edges of the mask.

This Ntomo mask would have been worn during the initiation rites with the Bamana people. It depicts a human face with five horns on top, known as ma kolo (bones). The eyes, nose and mouth of the mask are always strongly marked to reflect the knowledge acquired through these senses by the young initiates. The number of horns on top of an ntomo mask indicates gender. Supposedly the masks with three or six horns are considered male, those with four or eight horns are female, and those ending with two, five or seven horns represent an androgenic entity.

82
**AN UNUSUAL VERE
 SCULPTURE**
 Nigeria
 Wood
 H 47 cm
 Provenance
 Grassi Collection, Tervuren
€ 1,200 – 1,500





83

A RARE ZOOMORPHIC IBIBIO MASK

Nigeria
Wood, fibers
H 39 cm

Provenance
Private Collection, Germany
Lucien Van de Velde, Antwerp
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Cf. This figure is published in the African Heritage Documentation Center under nr.0092413

€ 1,800 – 2,500

The Ibibio and Ogoni make zoomorphic masks for different purposes. Antelope masks for example, worn in honour of founding ancestors, feature in agricultural ceremonies. The horns stand for male potency. This is a unique mask in the form of a bird, likely to be worn to honour ancestors as messengers to the other side, but its function will remain unknown.



84

A FINE IJO OTOBO MASK

Nigeria
Wood
H 25 cm

Provenance
Found in situ by Marc Felix in 1968
Phillipe Guimiot, Paris
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 1,200 – 1,500

This mask represents the hippopotamus, like most Ijo masks imitate dances of the water spirits themselves, and the masks sometimes exit or enter from the water. When danced, they help to avert disease and protect against evil spirits. Masks also accompany the dead to the afterworld and purify the community.



85

A MUMUYE LANGANA FIGURE

Nigeria
Wood
H 57 cm

Provenance
Jean-Michel Huguenin, Paris
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1972

Published
D. Grassi, Strutture, Vanni Scheiwiller
Editore Milano 1976 p. 89
Arts d'Afrique Noire, hiver 1986, p. 44

€ 4,500 – 6,000

First documented by scholars in the 1960s, these intriguing figures have been recognized by Modern Art historians like Arnold Rubin and others for their bold scale, their dynamic use of negative space, and the fluidity of their arms.

Lagalagana figures are used in different rituals: the figures played a central role in ancestor worship but also served as interceptors between here and the spirit world.

A VERY IMPORTANT VERE IHAMBE FIGURE

Nigeria

Wood, metal, seeds

H 58 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1975

Published

Daniele Grassi, "Strutture", Milan:
Vanni Scheiwiller/All'insegna del
pesce d'oro, 1976;78

François Neyt, "Les Arts de la Benué,
aux racines des traditions" = "The Arts
of the Benue, to the roots of tradition",
Tielt: Editions Hawaiian Agronomics,
1985:187, # IV.26

Exh. Cat. "Darteville: Collection
privées", by Pierre Darteville and
Valérie Darteville, Brussels, June
2015:#15

François Neyt, "Les Arts de la Benué,
aux racines des traditions" = "The Arts
of the Benue, to the roots of tradition",
Tielt 1985, p. 186

€ 20,000 – 30,000

This is an exceptional strong cubist figure
of the Vere, related in fuction to the more
realistic Lhambe figures of the neighbou-
ring Tiv.

Ihambe figures, referred to by the Vere
as "Twel" for the mounds they stood on,
could be both male and female and typi-
cally guarded the entrances of the houses
of women who had been married through
an exchange of daughters by two families.

The female figures represent an ideal mar-
riage candidate, a spiritual binding that
has great influence on the fertility of the
community. They were inherited through
the mother, every generation of women,
and place in front of the house of the wife
on the left side of the door opening "...to
ensure the good health of the women and
to show that the men respect their mother
and will not be visited by bad dreams
about his mother."





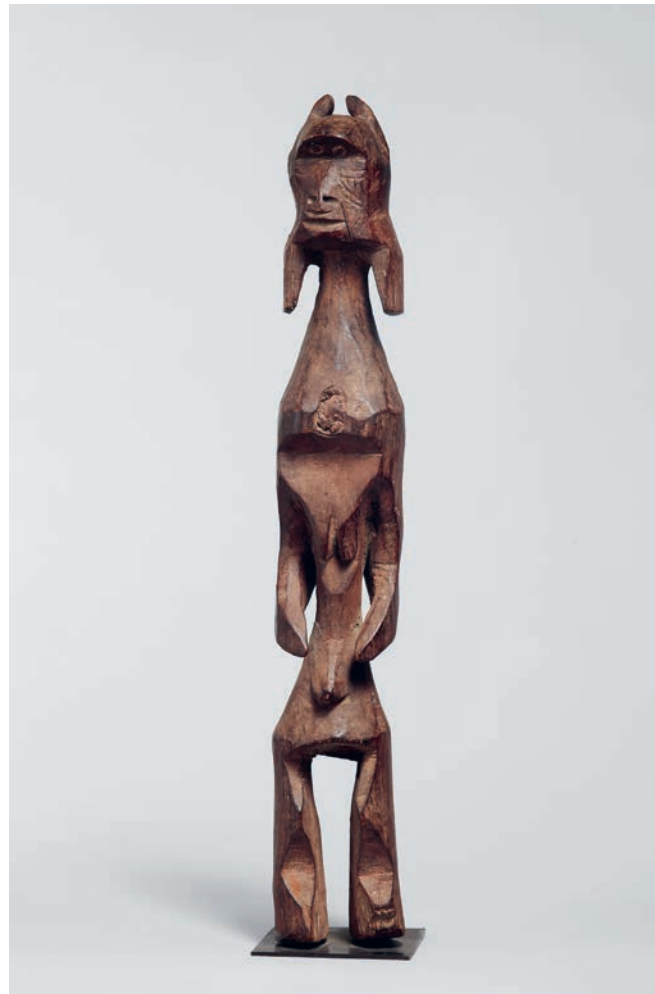
87

A GOOD WURKUN "KUNDUL" FIGURE

Nigeria
Wood, sacrificial patina
H 36 cm

Provenance
Martial Bronsin, Brussels
Collection Grassi, Tervuren since 1976

€ 1,800 – 2,500



88

A "LAGANA" FIGURE, MUMUYE

Nigeria
Wood
H 66 cm

Provenance
Jean-Michel Huguenin, Paris
Collection Grassi, Tervuren since 1987

€ 3,500 – 4,500

89

AN EXCEPTIONAL WURKUN "KUNDUL" PAIR

Nigeria
Wood, sacrificial patina
H 36 cm and 37 cm

Provenance
Phillipe Guimiot, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1975

€ 3,000 – 4,500

As a very strong stylised figure, with its cylindrical body, large heads and elongated necks, these Kundul are one of the most abstract figures from Nigeria

These mystical figures are produced by carvers who are often blacksmiths as well, hence the iron stakes in the base. The anthropomorphic sculptures are commissioned by the ritual expert and used for healing and well-being. After a long use of being rubbed with a solution of clay and polished with oil from a local seed, resulting in the deep and thick encrusted surfaces seen here.

They are known for their abstract, minimalist style, featuring large heads with austere faces and elongated, cylindrical bodies. The arms are often carved in relief across the torso and mounted on iron spikes to be placed in homes or communal areas.



AN IMPORTANT 19TH CENTURY YORUBA OPO ILE, ROYAL PALACE VERANDA POST

Nigeria

Wood

H 120 cm

Provenance

Jean Verheyleweghen (1910–1965), president of the Belgian Royal Society of Anthropology and Prehistory

Jean Verheyleweghen

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1974

Published

Daniele Grassi, “Struttare”, Milano, Pesce d’oro, 1976, p. 113

Valentine Plisnier, “Pierre Darteville and Tribal Art, Memory and Continuity”, 2020, 5 continents, p. 140 & 142

Cf. The male counterpart, likely from the same veranda, can be seen in Rivière (Marceau), “Les chefs-d’oeuvre africains des collections privées françaises/African Masterpieces from French Private Collections/Die Afrikanischen meisterwerke Französischer Privatsammlungen”, Paris PHILBI, 1975:86

€ 12,000 – 16,000

The veranda post of the royal palace where the place to show the kings interest in carving and history. Images of mothers and hunters, warriors and their gods express historical and cultural themes central to the development of Yoruba civilization. Deified women and men are the pillars, Opo, of society, both literally and figuratively as seen in these veranda posts. In this unique Opo, the image is that of the high priestess of the Shango cult Arole, the leader of the female worshippers of the God of thunder. This quick-tempered god Shango was according to mythology the king (oba) of the Oyo Empire during his lifetime and deified after his death as the god of thunder. The cult of Shango was widespread through Yorubaland, and numerous objects were made for his shrines and celebratory rituals. Priestesses of Sango danced with a dance wand (ose sango), demonstrating devotion to their lord.





91

AN EARLY MBEMBE FIGURE

Nigeria

Wood

H 79 cm

Provenance

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 2,500 – 3,500

On the border with Cameroun are the Mbembe, not to be confused with the other Mbembe in the Cross river region. This figure was said to personify the messenger for an oracle figure named Sanko. It once stood to the left of the large oracle, to accept messages for the cult members. From information collected, it appears this was always the messenger of good news. According to Lucien van de Velde, the oldest figures like this have a cavity in the front or back to receive gifts and magical donations..

92

AN OSHE SHANGO YORUBA

Nigeria

Wood

H 43 cm

Provenance

Galerie Kamer/Leloup, Paris

Grassi Collection , Tervuren since 1974

Exhibitions

"Utotombo", L'art d'Afrique noire dans les collections privées belges, Palais des Beaux-Arts 1988

Published

Daniele Grassi, Struttare, Milan, Vanni Scheiwiller, 1976 p. 29

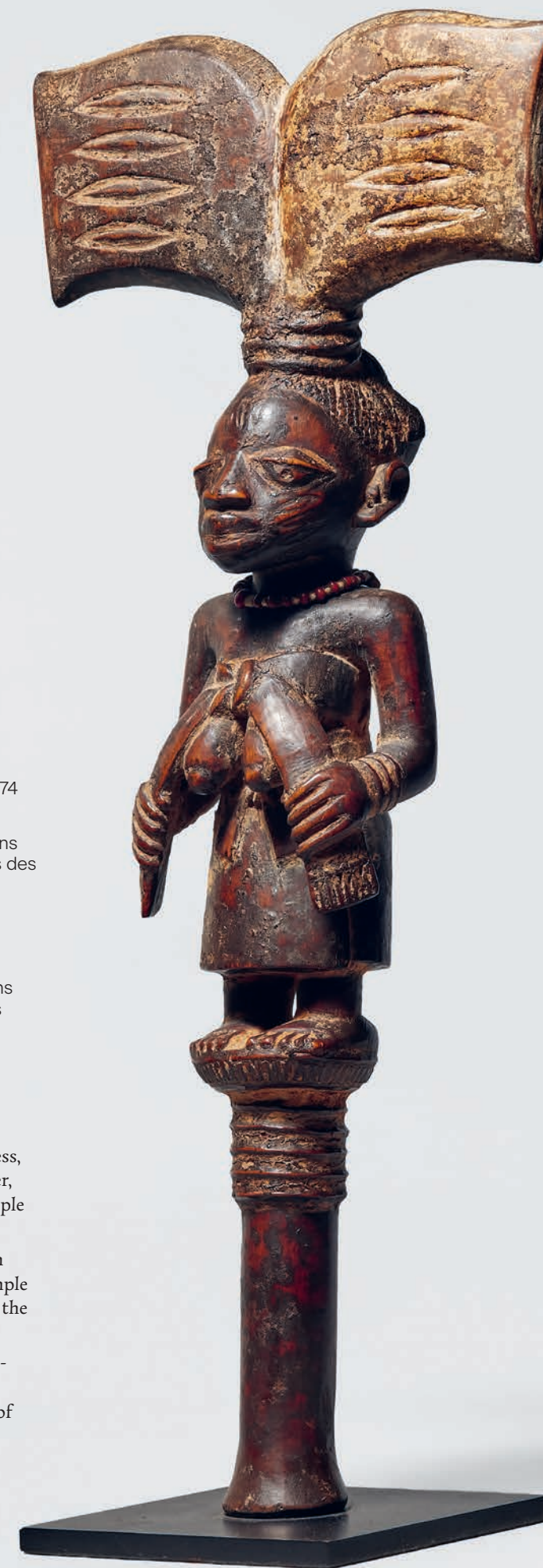
"Utotombo", L'art d'Afrique noire dans les collections privées belges, Palais des Beaux-Arts 1988 162, #96

€ 2,000 – 2,800

The scepters are carried by the priestess, devotees of Shango the god of thunder, who is worshipped by the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria.

This great Oshe Shango staff has been well published and is a very fine example of a depiction of the high priestess of the Shango cult.

In her hands she holds the dance vestment that is the emblem of the Arole, the leader of the female worshippers of Shango.





93

AN IMPORTANT IBO FIGURE BY THE "NEMI" MASTER

Nigeria

Wood

H 143 cm

Provenance

Henri Kamer, Paris

Grassi Collection, Brussels since 1971

Published

Daniele Grassi, *Struttura*,

Vanni Scheiwiller Editore,

Milan 1976, p. 91-93

Cf. This figure has been verified by Bernard de Grunne as a previously unknown sculpture by the Nemi master. See: Bernard De Grunne/Casanovas, "Monumental Sculptures from Nigeria" (2010)

€ 30,000 – 40,000

In all the main regions of Igbo country, shrines were erected in honor of local nature deities, heroes and mythological ancestors. In the heart of the Nri-Awka region, these gatherings of carved, painted and dressed wooden figures, inspired by the countless members of the extended family, numbered up to a dozen elements. Alusi have extravagant hairstyles, abdominal and facial scarification, and tattoo patterns that signify marks of beauty and high rank in the Igbo community.

The "Nemi masters" signature traits include the stylised ears, the strong cubistic facial features, the helmet like facial tattoos and the forceful protruding mouth.

Like most Alusi, naturalistic arms apart on each side of the body, and forearms extended forward with palms up to signify both the deity's willingness to receive offerings, as well as its generosity to ensure success and happiness of the community. Because carvings of alusi are relatively homogenous, it isn't possible to determine which deity the figure in the Grassi's collection represents by studying its appearance alone.

Other figures from the small corpus of the "Nemi master" can be found in the former collections of Hubert Goldet and Jacques Kerchache, where Henri Kamer probably has found this figure.



94

AN EXTREMELY RARE KU'NGANG MASK, BAMILEKE

Cameroun grasslands

Wood, pigment

H 29 cm

Provenance

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Cf. The mask is comparable to the one in "The Epstein Collection of Tribal and Exotic Sculpture", by Fagg (William), London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1960:#36

€ 4,000 – 6,000

This is a fearsome example of a rare Bamileke mask known as "Nkoh", a mask which is from a secret night society called "Ku'ngang". These are considered one of the most dangerous and ferocious of all Bamileke masks. They are only danced on occasion of important festivities. During the performance, the mask was fixed by ropes and sprinkled with water to calm its aggressiveness. "Kungan" is a secret society, led by nine priests, responsible for healing and truth-telling.



95

A 19TH CENTURY CAMEROUN FIGURE OF A NOBLEMAN

Cameroun grasslands

Wood

H 46 cm

Provenance

Martial Bronsin Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1980

€ 3,000 – 5,000

Only royalty and men of noble lineage were permitted, with the king's consent, to wear jewelry adorned crowns.

The left hand of the figure touches the drinking vessel and the right hand the loincloth, a conventional pose common to 19th-century Bamum sculpture. The ritual consumption of palm wine was considered a sacred activity and reinforced the Fon's spiritual and political power. Palm wine was also an essential component of sacrificial libations to the ancestors. The right hand may suggest a gesture assumed by high-ranking courtiers when talking to the king. Important men would respectfully bow their heads and speak through their raised hand because no one was permitted to look the king in the face or address him directly. The king was sacred and commanded the highest respect and reverence from his subjects. Placing the right hand on the loincloth also alludes to proper behavior, for one is composed and restrained in the presence of the king.





96

A 19TH CENTURY BAKOTA RELIQUARY GAURDIAN

With old collection number, in the hand
of Charles Ratton

Gabon

Wood, metal

H 60 cm

Exhibitions

Charles Ratton (presumed) or via him,
Paris

Guillaume Apollinaire, before 1925

Vicente Huidobro Collection

Vladimir Garcia Huidobro Amunátegui
(1948 by descent)

Eduardo Uhart, Chile (1989)

Drouot, Paris (1990)

Merton Simpson, New York (1990)

Merton Simpson, New York (2002)

Pierre Dartevelle, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Published

Drouot 10/12/1990, Lot 245

€ 38,000 – 45,000

A Kota reliquary guardian figure, or mbulu ngulu, is a sculpture from the Kota people of Gabon created to protect remains of important and revered ancestors. These figures are made of wood with copper and brass sheeting, are considered iconic sculptural expressions in African art, and are known for their influence on early 20th-century European artists like Picasso and Brancusi. The proportionally large head has radically simplified facial features appear in sculptural relief along a central vertical axis. Two forged crescent eyes and a wedge-shaped nose protruding, joined by a red copper band from the forehead.

The nose, like the rest of the figure, is carved from wood, and is sheathed in brass in keeping with the rest of the front of the head and neck. A crested coiffure adorns the head in three separate, adjoining

fronds that feature curvaceous hammered elements and are covered in brass sheets affixed to the wood with hidden nails. Beneath the head and neck, a stylised human torso of exposed wood, carved in openwork in an irregular lozenge formation, arguably constitutes the sculpture's most abstract element.

It is thought that the figurative form of the mbulu ngulu was intended to reinforce and communicate the reliquary's intense power. The Kota believed that the relics of important men and women retain power after death, providing protection and good fortune to an individual's descendants. The remains were preserved in containers made of bark or basketry. The mbulu ngulu stood atop this bundle, bound to it at the figure's lozenge-shaped base.





97

A 19TH CENTURY BAMUM MASK

Cameroun grasslands

Wood

H 36 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1975

Published

D. Grassi, Strutture, Vanni Scheiwiller

Editore Milano 1976 p. 1

€ 1,800 – 3,000

Various types of masks were associated with performances of Kwifoyn, the influential male secret society based at the Fons (king) palace.

Members of this society represented the Fon in ritual, political, and legal matters. Masqueraders appeared at funerals of deceased kwifoyn members, some of them wearing this type of helmet mask. The mask on top of the head could have been covered with fiber cloth and a feather tuft was inserted into a hole on top of the crest. The large bulging eyes and the pointed teeth were considered an ideal of beauty.

98

A FINE PUNU OKUYI MASK

Gabon

Wood

H 29 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 2,400 – 3,000



A SUPERB LEGA MASK

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, Kaolin

H 38 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1985

Cf. Biebuyck (Daniel P.), "Lega. Ethique et beauté au coeur de l'Afrique/Lega, Ethiek en schoonheid in het hart van Afrika/Lega, Ethics and Beauty in the Heart of Africa", Brussels: KBC & Snoeck-Ducaju, 2002: Cat. 21

€ 5,000 – 6,000

The Grassi collection showcases an exceptional assortment of early collected Lega masks. Since 1964, Pierre Darteville has personally supported Daniel Grassi in finding the best masks on the market. Besides, Grassi resided near the Tervuren museum and maintained close connections with various experts in the field, including Biebuyck, a prominent authority on the Bwami secret society.

The meanings and uses of Lega masks vary based on the context of their performance, similar to many initiation objects. During Bwami ceremonies, the masks are affixed to different body parts, stacked, hung on fences, displayed, dragged on the ground, and sometimes worn on the forehead with the beard covering the wearer's face. For example, the tiny wooden lukwakongo masks were affixed to arms, sides of heads, or foreheads, and were either held by hand or hung on fences, rather

than being worn on the face. The lukwakongo, represented by the smaller masks, have a heart-shaped face framed by a line formed by the nose, the eyebrows, and the planes of the cheeks, with holes around the lower base to hold a beard made of fibers. These masks are never worn on the face but are instead tied to the arm or displayed on a fence at Bwami meetings. The larger Muminia mask is worn on the face or top of the head, signifying "still needing initiation," and is worn by both the lowest grade members of the Bwami Society as well as the two highest ranks. The largest masks, known as idimu (ancestor) masks, are worn on the face or back of the head and can only be worn by men belonging to the two highest ranks of the Bwami Society. It is difficult to distinguish between the two larger masks without knowing the grade of the person who commissioned the mask.

The Bwami Society holds authority over various aspects of social and religious life in Lega society, making every Lega mask a mask from the Bwami Society. The smaller lukwakongo masks are worn on the body or hung on a fence to symbolize the ancestors' offspring, while only men in the two highest ranks of the Bwami Society are allowed to wear the larger masks. The simple shape and color of the Lega masks convey a profound poetry, with tiny reflective mica fragments scattered throughout the white, symbolizing spiritual communication with the ancestors. The white river clay in the region contains this silicate mineral, and when a Lega mask is worn near a fire, it reflects the flames light, creating a multitude of tiny stars through the mica, enabling a poetic conversation with the spirits.





100

AN UNUSUAL LEGA ZOOMORPHIC MASK

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood, Kaolin
H 20 cm

Provenance
Pierre Darteville Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1994

€ 5,000 – 6,000

101 ▷

AN EXCEPTIONAL LEGA MASK

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood, kaolin, feathers
H 31 cm

Provenance
Pierre Darteville Brussels 1994
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 8,000 – 12,000





102

A LEGA MASK

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, kaolin

H 25 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1985

€ 5,000 – 6,000

103 ▷

A LARGE AND IMPRESSIVE LEGA KIDUMU MASK

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, Kaolin

H 32 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 4,000 – 6,000





104

A FINE LEGA MASK WITH BEARD

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood, fibres
H 22 cm

Provenance
Pierre Darteville, Brussels 1993
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 5,000 – 8,000

105

A LEGA MASK

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood, fibers
H 21 cm

Provenance
Michel Wolf, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Brussels since 1982

€ 5,000 – 8,000



106

AN EXPRESSIVE LEGA MASK

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 16 cm

Provenance
Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection,
Tervuren since
1985

€ 3,000 – 4,000



107

AN MBOLE OFIKA FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

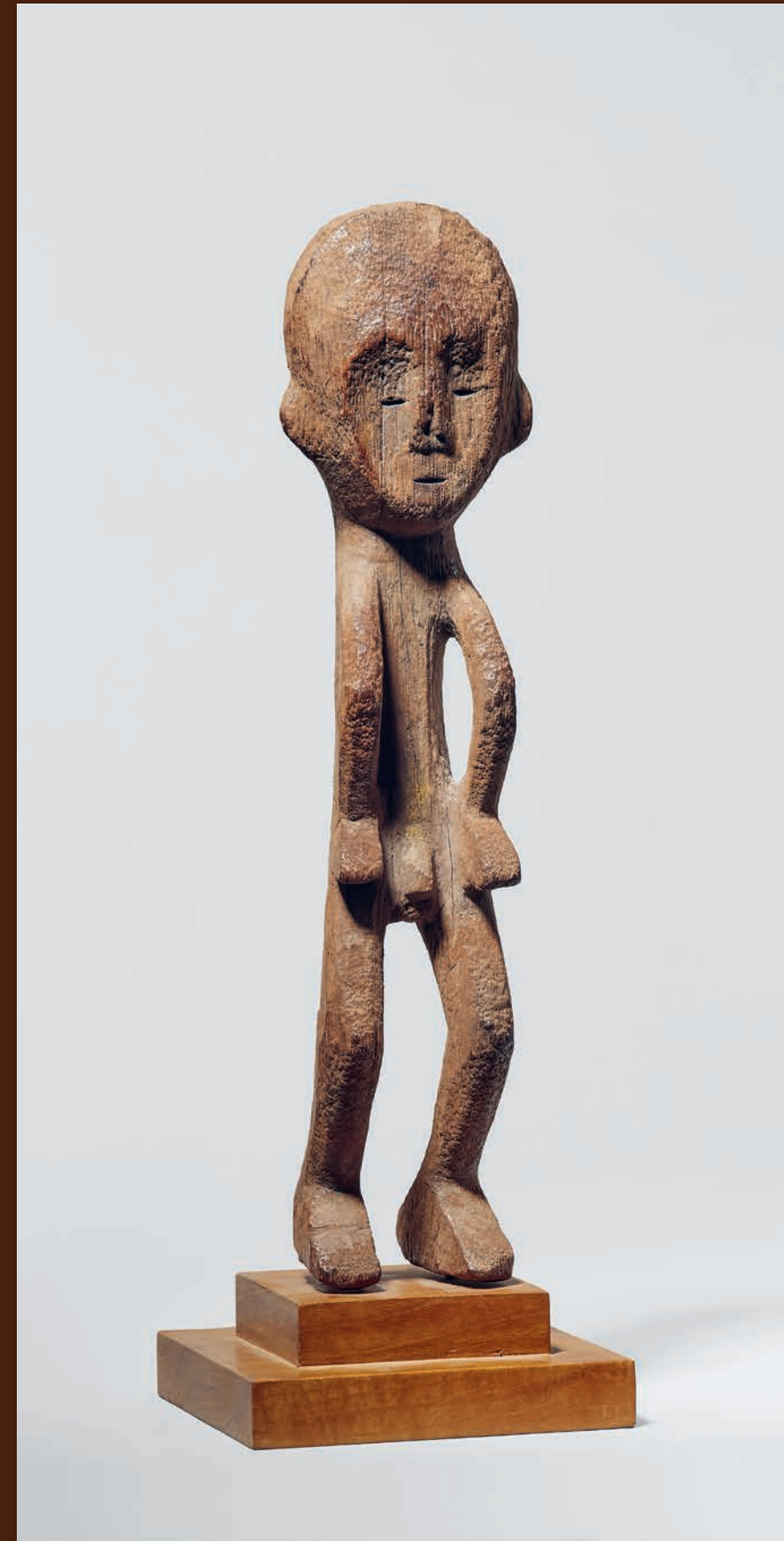
Wood

H 34 cm

Provenance
Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1977

€ 3,000 – 4,000



This figure takes the appearance of a hanged man. The facial expression has been described as one of resigned sadness.

Like the secret society of the neighbors, the Legas Bwami, the Lilwa philosophy and way of life were instilled into most members of Mbole society during a period of initiation during which they learned basic social and ethical precepts. All young men and some women (daughters of the highest-ranking initiates) were initiated.

Figures carved in this manner represent individuals who were hanged for violating the public order and transgressing the laws of the Lilwa. This graded association performed ritual, educational, jural, social, political, and economic functions (Biebuyck 1995). While the Lega use a multitude of small-scale objects as part of the initiation into Bwami, Lilwa's artifacts are few and are striking.



◀ 108

AN EXCEPTIONAL METOKO POST

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 145 cm

Provenance

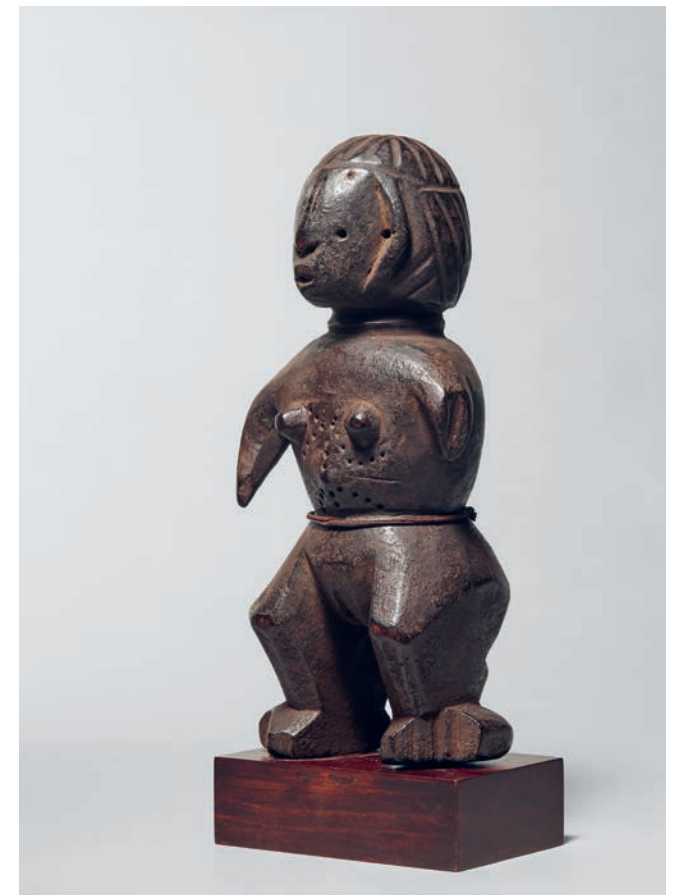
Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1986

Cf. Published in the African Heritage
Documentation Center under
nr. 003537g

€ 2,400 – 2,800

One of the visually striking abstract forms in African culture, resembling the "Eternal column" from Brancusi, are the Metoko posts. The use of repeated, stacked conical forms reference to the following of generations – the single head on top would be the ritual expert introducing the next generation on the social mores of the metoko society during the initiation periods.



109

A MANZA FIGURE, UBANGI

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 27 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels 1983

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Published
Arts d'Afrique Noire, hiver 1986,
pag. 43

€ 5,000 – 7,000

Six Bembe figures of the Grassi Collection

Many decades ago, when I was still in high school, I visited Daniele Grassi's home – his son Pietro and I were in parallel classes at the European School of Brussels – and I remember seeing some African objects. I did not know the first thing about African art, back then, but the way Mr. Grassi talked about these artworks made a lasting impression on me. Now, reviewing more of his collection, I realize how good his eye was. How unconventional, too. This set of six figures, brought together over many years of selecting, testifies to his distinctive taste. Even though there are no collecting date for any of them, we consider the figures to come from the Bembe peoples.

Statues from the northwestern shores of Lake Tanganyika in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo often display a similar sculptural style. They are attributed to any of a handful of populations, commonly designated as Bembe, pre-Bembe, Buyu (or Boyo) and (Basi)Kasingo. Differences between these are vague. For instance, one particular statue in the holdings of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren), collected in the early 1900s, has been labe-

led “Bembe,” “Sikasingo,” and “Boyo” in successive publications. It is generally assumed that these names correspond to specific and distinct ethnic groups, but in reality, they do not. Since times immemorial, this Congolese border region has attracted populations with the most diverse historical backgrounds that came from the east and the south. During the last few centuries, about which we know a little more, settlement took place in waves of migration and displacement, leading to the fusion and fission of communities. Processes of amalgamation and dispersal crosscut through clans, lineages and families, resulting in an ethnic entanglement. The result is a complex blend of regional communities and cultural identities. Yet in the first half of the twentieth century, Belgian colonial administrators mistakenly treated these populations as historically and culturally homogenous groups, and artificially identified large territories with each of them. This created the illusion of an ordered space, an illusion eagerly adopted by art historians and art dealers, as well as collectors.

In the course of the nineteenth century, particular sections of the

Bembe adopted certain religious beliefs and ritual practices from the local Zoba and Sanze peoples. For one, they took over the sculptural tradition of representing lineage ancestors by wood figures. These could be male or female, and were kept by the heir of the deceased who would perform sacrificial ceremonies to honor and placate the dead, manipulations that sometimes left a crusty patina. Ancestors were considered to be the activating power behind dreams and nature spirits, and they were capable of striking people with sickness and death. Beyond providing ritual protection, the significance of the physical portrayal of ancestors was also political: it facilitated legitimizing claims over a given territory. Although displaying very different styles, Grassi's anthropomorphic statues are most likely Bembe ancestor figures. The closed eyes, especially, are noteworthy: they imply blindness, eternal sleep, in other words, the condition of not belonging to the world of the living. Their shapes and details sometimes reveal who is represented. For instance, the female statue holding the belly possibly connotes a person who did not die without offspring. The block-shaped

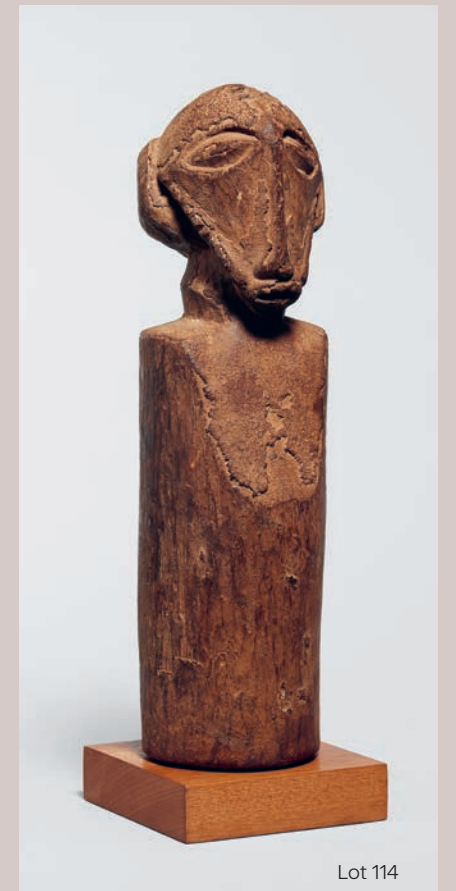
figure, which is heavily patinated, may look unfinished. A few similar examples are known, however, all displaying clearly defined chest and abdomen, like this one. One interpretation suggests that these figures represent an ancestor who died during the birth of the owner. Such dead were particularly feared, which may explain the multiple offerings this effigy was presented with.

Also in the nineteenth century, some Bembe groups adopted the Zoba creator god 'Alunga (sometimes spelled Kalunga), which they turned into the spirit of the dead. In the human realm, 'Alunga played the role of the ancestors: it assured prosperity to those who obeyed the social laws, and punished those who did not. The Bembe 'Alunga Association was a closed society whose initiates would call the spirit to materialize in the guise of a large helmet mask. Such masks are distinguished by two faces, oriented in opposite directions, each one consisting of two huge, whitened eye sockets with protruding pupils. The Bembe also made a reduced version of the mask, giving rise to 'Alunga janiform heads. Each leader of a lodge of the 'Alunga Association

possessed one, and they served in protection and healing rituals.

Grassi's large head with the raffia collar and headdress shows traces of sacrifices offered to the 'Alunga spirit. It is characterized by greatly enlarged ocular orbits, alternating white and red colors produced by kaolin and hematite-rich earth, respectively. These colors probably symbolize the complementarity of the female and male spheres: for the Bembe, white refers to female fecundity and mother's milk, while red connotes masculinity and the hunt's blood. The small Janus half-figure, which displays an even more intricate alternation of white, red, and black planes, is not related to 'Alunga. In all likelihood it is an insignia of a high-ranking member of the Bwami Association. This is another closed society, one that the Bembe shared with the neighboring Lega peoples. Grassi also collected half a dozen masks that were used by members of the Bwami Association of the Lega.

Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers



Lot 114

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110

AN EXCEPTIONAL KALUNGA, BEMBE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 39 cm

Provenance

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Cf. As illustrated by a very similar statuette kept at the Royal Museum of Central Africa, in Tervuren (inv. No. R.G.55.170.7/1), collected by Daniel Biebuyck in 1952

€ 4,500 – 6,000

A large and impressive Kalunga head with great expressive force.

According to Daniel Biebuyck, this figure represents Alunga, grandson of the founding ancestor, wearing the two-faced mask that symbolizes the initiatory society of the same name. The fibers around the neck and the top of the were added to heighten the resemblance with the founding ancestor.

111

A SOPHISTICATED KALUNGA, SIKASINGO

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, fibers

H 9.5 cm

Provenance

Pierre Dartevelle Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1975

Published

Daniele Grassi, *Strutture*, Milano, Vanni Scheiwiller, 1976 p.107

Cf. For a similar one see Daniel Biebuyck "Statuary from the pre-Bembe hunters", Tervuren 1981, now in the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Central, Tervuren (inv. no. "R.G. 55.3.156")

€ 3,000 – 4,500

The owner of this fine charm was a member of the highest grade in the Bembe variant of the Bwami association. The sculpture called both "Ase'a but in other ritual context Kalunga, was used in the rites of the Bwami association, not as an ancestral representation, but as an initiation object that conveyed the far-reaching wisdom and keen sense of equity of the high initiate. The figure reminds of the large Janus heads from the Bembe, and indeed they both refer to Alunga.





112

A RARE BASIKASINGO FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 31 cm

Provenance

Michel Wolf, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren
since 1979

€ 4,000 – 6,000

113

A BOYO (BUYU) POWER FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 31 cm

Provenance

Galerie Lepage, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1977

Cf. Biebuyck in MRAC 1995: 372,
text to cat. 200

€ 6,000 – 8,000

Boyo communities within the Democratic Republic of Congo are renowned for their series of majestic ancestral representations. It is a classic example of Boyo commemorative representations in which distinguished leaders are depicted simultaneously as serenely introspective and as an awesome, otherworldly physical presence. According to Daniel Biebuyck, the male and female figures were “part of the cult for ancestors, founders of small independent political entities [...]”. The figurines, often occurring in ensembles comprising several named and genealogically related ancestral personages, are kept in small shrines under the authority and guardianship of a petty chief, village headman or dominant lineage elder. Throughout the territory, that is identified with the Boyo ethnic group, cult for individually identified ancestors (bas-humbu) is practiced at different levels of the lineage structure and sometimes merged with various beliefs in nature spirits (biseko, bahombo), but few sculptures are used in these cults. In times of crisis, the senior in charge of the cult would sleep in the shrine, and with some helpers engage in invocation, praises and libations for his ancestors to obtain their benevolence and cooperation.” The fine encrusted patina on the offered lot can be directly ascribed to this kind of libation ritual.





114

A 19TH CENTURY SIKASINGO FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 41 cm

Provenance

Galerie Pierre Dartevelle, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1974

Published

D. Grassi, *Strutture*, Vanni Scheiwiller

Editore Milano 1976 Page 85

€ 5,000 – 6,000

The Sikasingo sculptures are recognizable according to a well-defined style; a powerful body with a thick, cylindrical torso. The exaggerated elongation of the torso guides the viewer's eye towards the face of the figure, created as an inverted triangle framed by a crenelated beard and crowned by a classic Bembe coiffure.

Close to the Boyo and Pre-Bembe sculptors and far from the more naturalistic style of the neighbouring Luba, the Sikasingo artists developed a geometric, almost architectural style, tending towards abstractionism that enhance the sculptural monumentality.



115

AN IMPORTANT EARLY BOYO, BEMBE

Democratic Republic of the Congo
H 45 cm

Provenance
Galerie Lepage, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1977

Cf. Nicolas De Kun, "L'Art Boyo",
Africa-Tervuren, Vol. XXV, No. 2,
1979, pp. 29–44

€ 20,000 – 30,000

Boyo communities were once renowned for their series of majestic royal ancestral representations that varied stylistically from one community to another. As with comparable traditions among the Tumbwe, Tabwa, and Hemba peoples, these ancestral ensembles, which comprised between four and seven works each, were protected on altars in secluded enclosures. Individual sculptures were named after the particular ancestors they invoked. The prominence of the closed eyes refers to the subject's status as a being endowed with a heightened sense of the spiritual realm. Early Boyo or "Pre-Bembe" ancestor figures are exceedingly rare, most of them now in museums and collections.

While they follow the same general scale, conceptualization, and similar iconography as the Hemba and Luba ancestral figures, the Eastern Bembe styles are very distinctive and instantly recognizable. The comparison to western Cubism, with their clean geometric forms and linear artistic quality is evident. The sculptors who composed these sacred ancestral images maneuvered the tension between geometry and fluidity, straight lines and curves, abstraction and naturalism; the result at the height of these traditions was a hieratic portrayal of the nobility, wisdom, and spiritual power of the all-important progenitors of the sculptor and his clientele.





116

AN EARLY MFONDO MASK, LWALWA

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 34 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 3,500 – 4,500

These masks were highly prized by European collectors for their strong geometric elements, the sharply angled planes and smooth unadorned surfaces. They typically have concave faces bisected by long vertical noses, narrow slits for eyes, round ears, and rectangular mouths. Mask forms are very different from neighbouring people like the Luluwa in their clean abstraction of geometric forms and a prominent nose that were inspired by the beaks of different birds. These masks were worn at dances to celebrate the circumcision and initiation of young men into the Ngongo society and to appease the spirits that control hunting.

117

A FINE BEMBE FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, ceramic

H 19 cm

Provenance

Lucien van de Velde, Antwerp

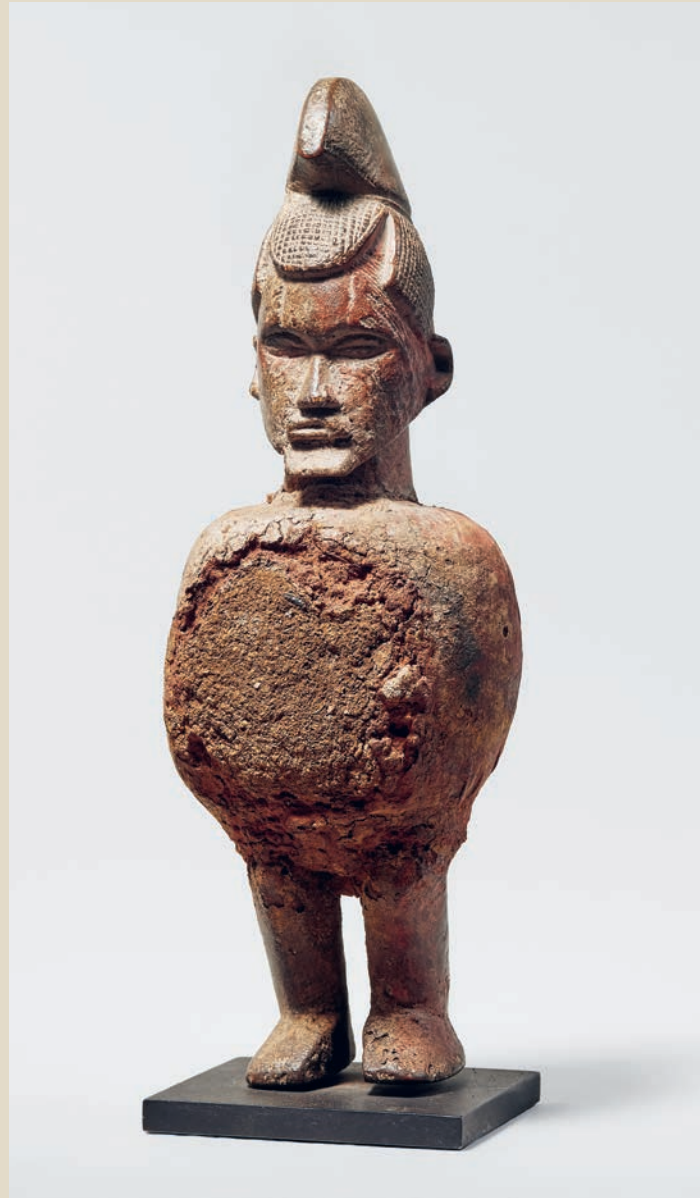
Photograph Johan henau, Antwerp 1977

Collection Grassi, Tervuren

€ 3,500 – 4,500

These small sacred sculptures among the Bembe served as elements of spiritual protection. Sometimes magical substances are inserted into an anal orifice, covered with sacred white clay known as mukuya, and then consecrated by a priest-diviner (Nganga). The beauty of the figure's strong, finely rendered features and intricate body sacification enhance the owner's religious experience.





118

A TEKE FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood, magical substances
H 29 cm

Provenance
Phillipe Guimiot, Paris
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1975

Literature
Grassi (Daniele), "Strutture", Milano:
Vanni pesce d'oro, 1976 p. 95

€ 2,500 – 3,500

119 ▷

AN EXCEPTIONAL PAIR OF TEKE BUTI FIGURES

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood, magical charges, pigment, clay
H 38 and 44 cm

Provenance
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Published
"Biennale" Paris: catalogue Jean-Baptiste
Bacquart, 2017:41 cover, #XIX

€ 6,000 – 8,000

The Teke magical figures are easy to recognize; The thin eyes, triangular nose, a prominent forehead often with thin parallel vertical scars across the cheeks and temples, often with a small geometric beard. Under the large terracotta belly emerge the cylindrical legs, with a small conical tip to indicate that the knees are bent.

The barrel-shaped trunk of the figure is filled with a potent medicinal substance (bonga), which fills the body cavity of the figure.

Edouard Ponel, a French officer and art of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885), was present in the region where such works were produced in the mid-1880s. He records that the use of such sculptures was common when Teke chiefs debated important matters, and their invocation was often linked with drinking rituals where kola and palm wine would be spat onto the figure. Ponel describes how, before the Teke chief spoke, "he takes an ebony fetish, places it between his knees and sprinkles it with palm wine." Throughout the discussion, the chief continued to tap the figure and pour wine on it so as to encourage the ancestral force contained within to play a part in the decision-making process.





120

A LARGE AND IMPORTANT NKISI N'KONDI

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood, metal
H 51 cm

Provenance
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1983

Cf. For a very similar head, seen the ears mouth and hands, see Steven Phelps "Art and Artifacts of the Pacific, Africa and the Americas: The James Hooper Collection", London: Hutchinson, 1976:397, plate 24

€ 14,000 – 18,000

This is a very large figure from the Kongo people, mid 19th century, originally around 70 cm tall with finely carved features, detailed ears and inlaid eyes.

In its original setting, this sculpture functioned as the vessel for a spirit. It is called nkisi, or powerfigure, a term that designates both the ancestor or nature spirit that inhabit it, and the container itself.

In the shape of a human figure with pieces of iron these are called nkisi nkondi, "a hunter spirit-vessel". Such a power figure used to hunt thieves,

bewitchers, and people who had broken taboos or who did not keep their word. Each nail, small or large, driven into the wood corresponds with a specific request for action addressed to the nkisi-spirit, whose supernatural powers were invoked and stirred up. Each nail or blade of iron, an object in the Congo of wealth and pres-

tige, represents the pleas and demands for support that it was presented with and of which it took care.

This ancient figure would have had magical substances necessary to attract and fix a nkisi in the vessel, and we can see the traces of the red earth from a grave site. Over the course of decades, priests, healers, and users added substances to the figure, to trigger its powers, to seal agreements, or to remind the nkisi what to do. This particular figure was used for generations, showing its importance as a magical device.





This harp, as one of the oldest known Kundi, was a highlight of the Mangbetu exhibition in the Royal Library in Brussels 1992. The neighbouring Azande and the Mangbetu share a love for harp music. This "Kundi" was played by aristocrats and professional musicians for storytelling and song. The instrument has a sound box covered in animal skin and uses a unique tuning system where the strings are adjusted by alternating loops along the conical neck. In this example, the summit of the five-stringed harp is carved to represent a human figure. The elongated representation of the head is a reference to the past Mangbetu practice of shaping the head during infancy by means of gentle pressure. The head is crowned with fine linear incising, indicative of traditional Mangbetu coiffures.

There are two reasons we can assume that this is one of the oldest Kundi. Later Mangbetu harps with full figures are much more realistically carved and highly decorated. This Kundi on the other hand is of an archaic and expressive force that has no match; the sinuous lines that follow the eyebrows into the ears, the exposed teeth in the protruding mouth and chin, and the short dangling arms and legs all minimized to emphasize the phallic strength.

The other reason is that it is important to note that this rare 19th century harp has clear signs of use.

Mangbetu aristocrats surrounded themselves with a wide variety of finely crafted utilitarian objects. In the early 20th century, the importance of the harp as a musical instrument was replaced by its importance as an art object, this means that later instruments were completely unplayable.

121

A VERY IMPORTANT 19TH CENTURY KUNDI "HARP" MANGBETU, UPPER UELE,

North-east Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, leather

L 68 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1987

Exhibitions

Brussels, Belgium: "Mangbetu. Afrikaanse Hofkunst uit Belgische prive-verzamelingen", KB, 22 October – 20 December, 1992

Literature

Exh. Cat. "Mangbetu. Afrikaanse Hofkunst uit Belgische prive-verzamelingen", Brussels, KB, 1992:#70

€ 24,000 – 28,000



122

A YOMBE NKISI FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, metal

H 30 cm

Provenance

Scheut mission Kangu, now Democratic Republic of the Congo (before 1960)

Likely Collected in situ by Father Leo Bittremieux for the Scheut Mission in the Kangu region, between 1907 and 1909

Peter Loebarth, Munich

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

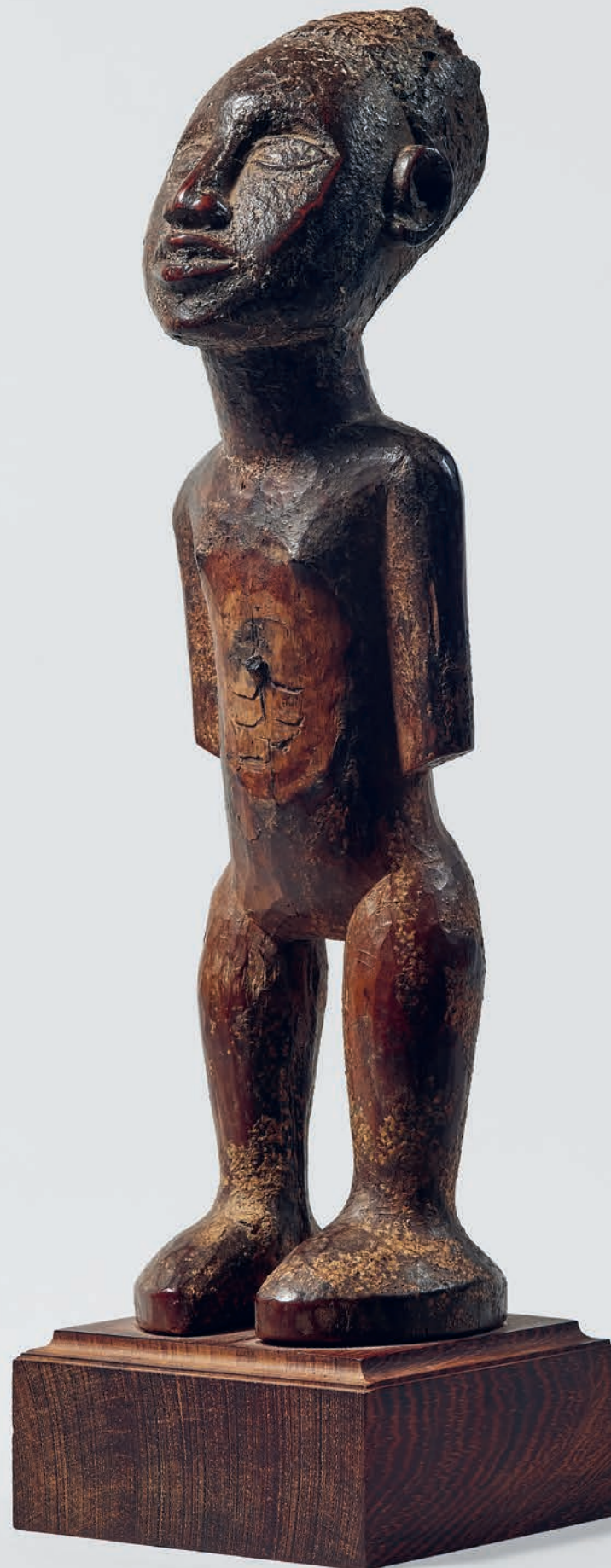
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Cf. Other similar figures from the Scheut Mission are published in the catalogue "Mayombe. Maîtres de la magie", Musée de Louvain-la-Neuve, 8 April–3 July 2011

€ 3,000 – 4,000

The Scheut mission was stationed in the Bayombe region since 1885 and became famous for the work of father Bittremieux where he carried out anthropological and sociological research and studies the languages of the peoples of the Mayombé country.

The Yombe, like many of the Kongo people make these powerfigures to regulate spiritual affairs but also use them as contracts. They were used to literally "hammer out agreements" by placing nails or implements in them with clear implications as to what would happen to people who broke the agreements. The Nkisi are used by their owner or an expert in spiritual affairs or nganga, to please the different spirits who are supposed to regulate the world. When a nganga believes that a figure has lost its power, it is discarded and may be sold.



123

A RARE KONGO KAAMBA FLYWHISK

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, hair, resin

H 45 cm

Provenance

John Dintenfass, New York

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1986

Cf. Marc Leo Felix, "Art & Kongos", 1995: 188: "Dans la sculpture kaamba s'impose, en premier lieu, l'icône omniprésente de la femme aux deux bras levés tenant ses mains derrière les oreilles."

€ 3,000 – 5,000

A very fine fly whisk like this one is an object of high status, used by chiefs and healers for ceremonial, judicial, and spiritual purposes, rather than for practical fly-swatting.

According to Marc Felix, in Kamba sculpture we find this classic depiction of the woman with two raised arms holding her hands behind her ears. Surrounded by neighbours (Beembe, Dondo) who carve their tribal scarifications in very high relief, the Kamba seem to favour finer incisions, more discreet they occupy a large space on the trunk and flanks.





124

A RARE FEMALE UBANGI FIGURE, UPPER SANGHA

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood, kaolin, hair
H 85 cm

Provenance
Martial Bronsin, 1985
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1985

Cf. Another large female figure with hair, collected by Alphonse Voillot, during the exploration mission of the Likouala River and the region between Sangha and Oubangui in 1889 is now in the Musée Quai Branly, inventory number 71.1901.50.1

€ 6,000 – 8,000

An unusual large sculpture, covered in kaolin and small black dot, with minimalist details and a solemn face. Very few large female figures are known from this region. This ancestral figure is covered in lime to refer to the deceased's status, as also identified by a clear ribcage.



125

A NGBAKA FEMALE FIGURE

Ubangi, northwestern Congo
Wood
H 33 cm

Provenance
Collection Peter Loebarth, Munich
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1985

Published
Arts d'Afrique Noire, winter 1986, p. 44

€ 1,800 – 2,500

This figure represents Nàbo, the mythical ancestor and wife of the trickster god Sètò. Thanks to Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers' "Ubangi: Art and Cultures" in 2007, we finally have an idea of the cultural impact of the Northwestern Congo influence, Ubangian sculpture was the last major unstudied area of art from sub-Saharan Africa. The figures were blackened and covered in red kula powder from the camwood tree. A cola nut was then chewed and the fibers spat onto the figures. If someone had a problem (sickness, sterility or an unsuccessful hunt), they would consult a seer, who would try to find the cause by divination. If necessary the seer would order the figures to be placed on an altar and the rite to be performed, giving instructions how to reverse the spell.

The figures are very diverse due to the large region and the extensive migration in the region. There are nevertheless a few identifying characteristics.

One of the main stylistic features of Ngbaka statuary is a vertical line on the center of the forehead, leading down from below the hairline, sometimes terminating at the root, sometimes at the tip of the nose. Sometimes you can find, like on this figure, (dotted) lines to the left and right of the nose ridge.



126

A LUBA NKISI FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, fibres, beads

H 31 cm

Provenance

Field collected by Francois Christiaens, 1960's

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 2,000 – 2,500

This classical Luba figure, with a contemplative regal expression can be found by the Luba and shows their ideals of beauty and power. Emblems of Luba kings often are depicted in female form in the belief that women are the most efficient guardians of secrets; one Luba proverb states: 'only the body of a woman is strong enough to hold a spirit as powerful as that of a king.

This Nkishi was kept in a special enclosure positioned in a highly visible location, such as the center of the village or near the chief's house. It was cared for by a guardian who also served as an interpreter for the nkishi whose messages were received through dreams or possession. Collective consultations occurred following specific dreams or nightmares, and recurrently during celebrations related to the appearance of the new moon – an essential symbol of new life and a reference to the large round head of the figurine. On those occasions, the nkishi was taken out of its enclosure to be recharged by the moon's life-force. It was sprinkled with the blood, red earth and anointed with palm oil, giving it its distinctive shiny red patina.

127

A FINE JANUS NKISI, LUBA

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, fibres

H 34 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1982

€ 1,800 – 2,500

The smaller Nkisi figures were often commissioned by individuals and families. Carefully selected medicines, or bilongo, composed of animal, vegetable, or mineral elements, are the source of a nkisi's sacred power and efficacy. Like a mobile phone connected to the other world, these communication devices need to be periodically reinvigorated through additions and offerings, linking the spiritual leader "nganga" and his client to the ancestral realm and its curative forces.





128

AN IMPORTANT JANUS HEMBA KABEJA FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood
H 29.5 cm

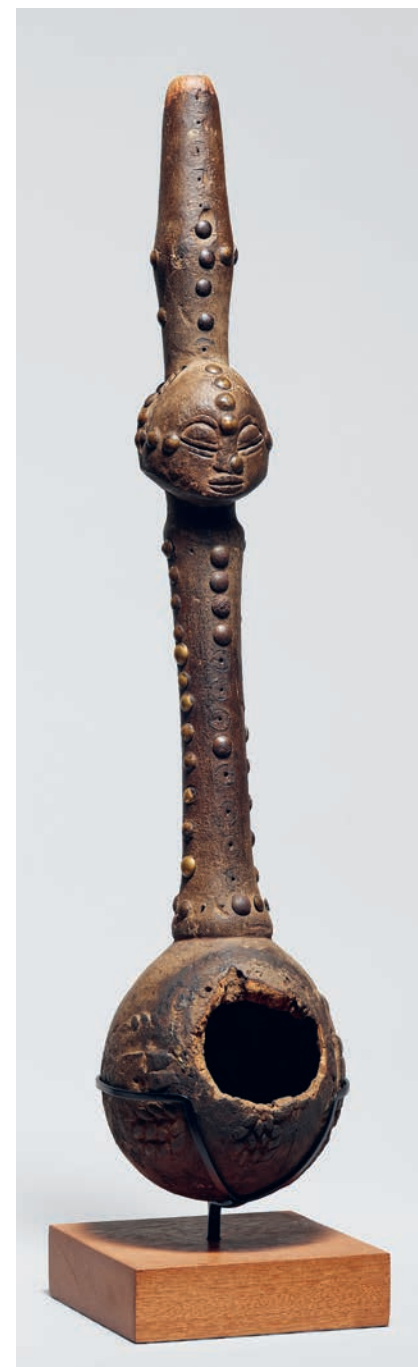
Provenance
Francois Christiaens, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

PUBLISHED
Bernard de Grunne: "Kabeja. La
Redoutable Statuaire des Hemba",
Brussels, 2012:36-37

Cf. See images in the African Heritage
Documentation Center 0123339

€ 2,800 – 3,500

This is a fine example of an early kabeja. These were used in ancestral and fertility rites, functioning in the duality of male and female ancestors. The figure, once it was magically charged, would promote equilibrium and harmony between both men and women, as well as between the living and their ancestors.



129

AN IMPORTANT LUBA CEREMONIAL PIPE

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood, metal
H.54 cm

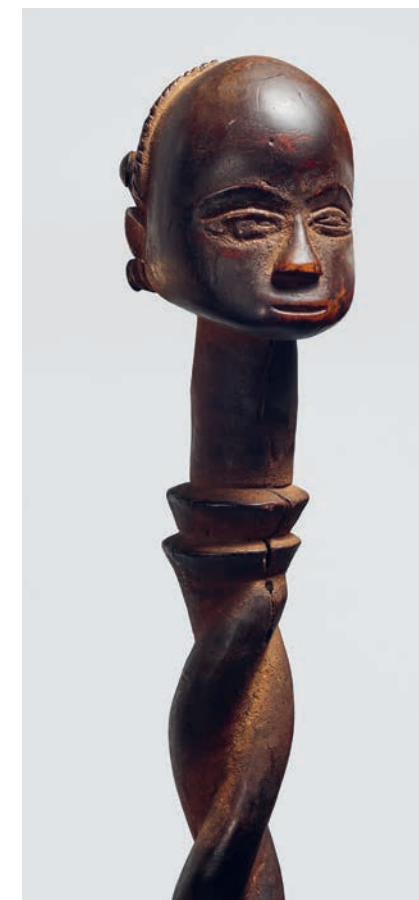
Provenance
Pierre Darteville, brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Published
Arts d'Afrique Noire, hiver 1986, pag. 43

€ 1,800 – 2,500

Luba anthropomorphic water pipes are among the most inventive and refined sculptures of Luba Art. According to Professor Allan F. Roberts (Trésors d'Afrique, Brussels, 1995:360), these pipes have been used since time immemorial by the populations of eastern Congo for smoking either locally grown tobacco which is considered a mild narcotic as well as a social and cultural factor. Specifically water pipes are used by the Luba and related populations such as the Tabwa to reduce the harshness of tobacco which is not dried for a long time.

A famous photograph from 1910 shows a Luba chief or soothsayer smoking a water pipe placed in the cupule of a Luba cup-bearer, underscoring the many sacred connections between divination and the use of tobacco. According to Roberts, the figure and the water gourd of the anthropomorphic pipes are considered "feminine" while the reed which is connected to the terracotta bowl (missing in our pipe) is "masculine". This pipe therefore symbolizes the relationship between men and women in this matrilineal society.



130

A LUBA SCEPTER "KIBANGO"

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood
H 124 cm

Provenance
Francois Christiaens, Brugge
Joseph Christiaens, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 1,500 – 2,000

A "Kibango" is a ceremonial scepter used by leaders of the Luba symbolizing authority. These prestigious objects are intricately carved, featuring geometric patterns known as "Dibulu" and topped with a carved face or figure representing a ruler. They signify the social position and connection to the Luba kingdom's lineage.



131

AN IMPORTANT LUBA MBOKO FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood
L 30 cm

Provenance
Frans M. Olbrechts, Wezembeek-
Oppem, Belgium
Grassi Collelction, Tervuren

Cf. Frans Olbrechts, "Plastiek van
Kongo". Antwerpen, Brussel, Gent,
Leuven: Uitgeversmij N.V. Standaard-
Boekhandel, 1946.

€ 3,000 – 4,000

The actual Mboko or divination vessel is the one held by the seated figure here. These bowls are created to forecast future events and this is a good example of how knowledge and divination are visualized in Luba culture. Luba bowl figures commemorate the first mythical Luba diviner, Mijibu wa Kalenga, and were used by royal diviners who used them as oracles. This wonderful stylised figue was in the collection of Prof.Frans Olbrechts, the pioneer of researching African objects and works of art in their own right.

132

A LUBA SCEPTER "KIBANGO"

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood
H 157 cm
Provenance
Pierre Dartevelle, Brussels
Collection Grassi, Tervuren since 1984
€ 2,000 – 3,000

The owner of this staff, like the owners of all Luba staffs, was recognized as having supernatural powers. The closed eyes on the head on this staff allude to clairvoyance whilst the three horns on top refer to the medicine that gave the staff's owner similar supernatural powers.





133

AN IMPORTANT
SEATED ROYAL
HEMBA SINGITI
FIGURE

Panda Luganze, Luika river, Democratic
Republic of the Congo
Muvula wood
H 79 cm

Provenance
Peter Loebarth, Kinshasa
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Brussels
Sotheby's Paris, 2008, lot 148

Sotheby's 2008, African & Oceanic Art,
lot 148
Cf. François Neyt, "La Grande Statuaire
Hemba du Zaïre", UCL Arts Africains,
1977

€ 80,000 – 100,000





Carved from the sacred wood *muwula* (*chlorophora excelsa*), by an honoured master carver or *ngoongo*, this is an exceptional example of a Hemba Singiti sculpture. The Hemba people have a rich cultural tapestry reflected in their art and artifacts. Among these, the Singiti figure holds a particularly significant place, embodying the complex social and spiritual beliefs of the Hemba. These wooden sculptures serve profound cultural, ceremonial, and spiritual functions.

Hemba ancestor effigies are the prerogative of princely houses which expressed through these works both ancestral worships, as is the custom in central Africa, from the Fang in the North-West of Gabon to the Boyo, Tumbwe, and the Bembe. The figure is also the expression of a relative stabilization of the clans, and consequently that the ground belongs to them. [...] These prestigious chiefs present themselves in their statuary with the emblems of their power: lance, sceptre or knife. In this case, the figure is sat upon a seat, which is quite rare. The authority of the prince is thus further accentuated [...] in this work of rare quality.' #

According to François Neyt (expertise April 14, 2008), 'this rare work of great quality testifies, as an historical and artistic document, to a period of considerable cultural development which it is reasonable to ascribe to a time well before slavery and the arrival of Europeans in

the second half of the 19th century, if not even earlier.'

The archetypal style, the delineation of the coiffure, the patina with its deep multilayered black coating confirms the C14 dating of mid 19th century, making this figure one of the oldest surviving pieces and we can date this sculpture to a period of expansion of the Hemba kingdoms, and more specifically, to the heart of the northern Hemba migration to the banks of the Luika. Also, according to François Neyt, this period which was a time of cultural development was the apogee of Hemba effigies.

The person who collected this figure reported that it came from the village of Panda Luganza. The style of this effigy is connected to other works located along the Luika river, a tributary of the Lualaba, the great headstream of the Congo river. It can be compared from a morphological and stylistic point of view with the effigy of a squatting ancestor reproduced in Neyt (page 276-277). Its characteristic hairstyle, composed of cruciform braids knotted on top of the head, is found on several ancestor figures from the same area.

The Yaka produce two genres of figural sculptures: the fetish figure (*Nkisi*) which bears medicinal ingredients and these ancestral figures (*Bapfumu*). According to Yaka belief, the latter are regarded as receptacles of the spirits of deceased an-

cestors. Healers, diviners, and chiefs use these figures in order to invoke the ancestors' intercession and guidance. Therefore, figures such as this one serve as visual and tactile reminders of the ancestors' assured assistance in procuring good health, fortune, and protection against any harm. It represents a special high ember of society and was probably referred to as the chief or *Nkaaka* "grandfather". Its beaded necklace and loincloth are now missing, but the high crests of the hairstyle are to fashion of high ranking members in the region in the late 19th century. The figure's mouth is open, as if in speech. Concave planes set off the expressive face from the hairline, ears, and neck of the abstracted figure. The arm and hand curve upward to touch the chin in an unusual gesture associated with the art of the Yaka and the neighbouring Hungaan people.

134

A RARE AND
COMPLETE LULA
MASK.

Kwango, Southwestern Congo

Wood

H 37 cm

Provenance

Michel Wolf, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1981

€ 2,000 – 2,400



135

AN IMPORTANT YAKA
FIGURE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 45 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection,

Tervuren since 1985

Published

Arts d'Afrique Noire,

hiver 1986, p. 43

€ 6,000 – 8,000





136

A SUKU MASK, KWANGO, SOUTH- WESTERN CONGO

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, pigments, fibers

H 49 cm

Provenance

Collection M.G.A., Paris Loudmer,
3/1980 lot 375

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Cf. This mask is published in the African
heritage Documentation Center under
nr. 0016408

€ 3,000 – 4,000

Helmet masks such as this represent the
elders in the society. They are to ensure
successful hunting, help cure illnesses
and protect the society from evil. The
animal shaped like a gazelle or antelope is
typically associated with folktales as well
as hunting stories.



137

AN MBALA (ZELA?) FIGURINE WITH A MONKEY

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood

H 17 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1982

€ 1,200 – 1,500



138

A YAKA "NDEEMBA" MASK

Southern Congo

Wood, fibers

H 54 cm

Provenance

Martial bronsin, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1982

Cf. This mask is in the African heritage Documentation Center under nr. 001659

€ 2,500 – 4,000

This initiation mask secures the future fertility of the young males. These masks were worn by the n'langala or camp leader and appeared at the end of the circumcision for Yaka boys. The exaggeratedly curved nose refers to the trunk of the elephant, which animal the Yaka admire for the way its trunk can reach into difficult places or root in the ground.



139

AN EXCEPTIONAL PENDE NGANGA MASK

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Wood, fibres, Ochre

H 43 cm

Provenance

Kegel-Konietzko, Hamburg

Pierre Darteville, Brussels 1989

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 3,000 – 4,000

A great expressive Pende mask. The white lines and the high hairdo indicate that this mask represents the Nganga-Ngombo or magical expert; in other words the high diviner wears the mask of the great diviner.



140

A CHOKWE CEREMONIAL SCEPTER WITH THREE STYLISTED HEADS

Angola
Wood
H 57 cm

Provenance
Private Collection, Belgium
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1986

€ 1,400 – 1,800

A scepter from the Chokwe culture is a symbol of authority. These prestigious staffs were carried by a servant who would plant it in the ground when the chief stopped. The powerful and refined style of the present scepter identifies it as a work created during the 19th century in the Angolan Chokwe heartland.

The pallet above shows different patterns, overlapping like the pangolin's scales on one side, and the other are concentric curves of female tattoos.



141

A LARGE CHOKWE "STRANGER" MASK

Angola
Wood, fibers
H 28 cm

Provenance
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 1,800 – 2,500



142

A LUENA SCEPTER

Angola
Wood
H 75 cm

Provenance
Charles et Blanche, Northampton, Massachusetts
Skinner Boston 2017
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Emmanuel Déhan, Brussels

€ 3,000 – 4,500



143

AN UNUSUAL CHOKWE "STRANGER" MASK

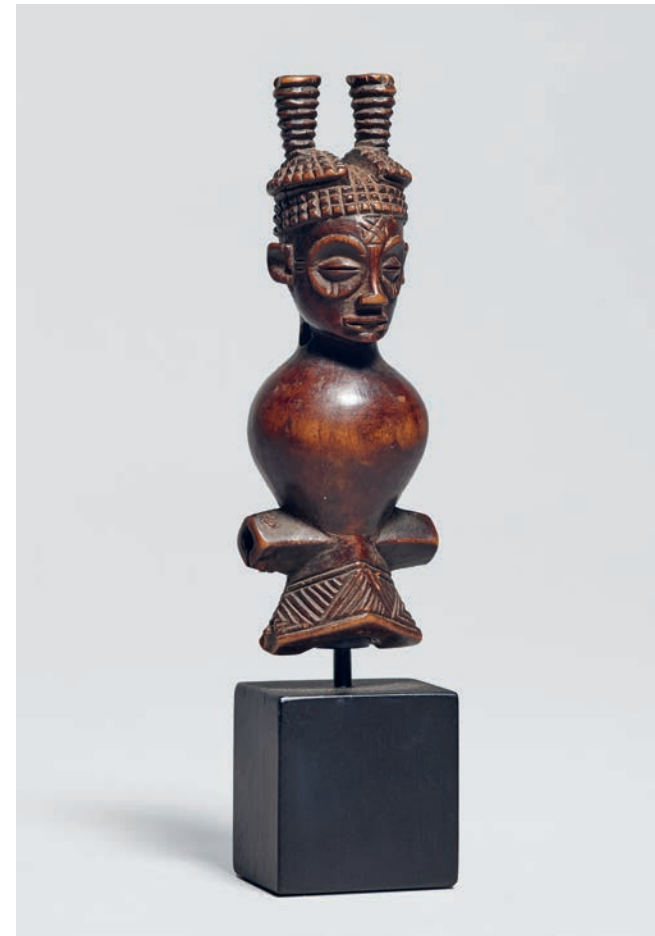
Angola
Wood, fibers
H 25 cm

Provenance
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren
Around 1900

Cf. Neyt (François), "Arts traditionnels et histoire au Zaïre/Traditional Arts and History of Zaïre", Louvain-le-Neuve, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1981: 225, fig.XII.3

€ 2,500 – 3,500

During the masquerades where the Mana Pwo and Chihongo masks are most prominent, other masks may appear, like political figures, or animals that relate to hunting. In this case the mask is the outsider or "stranger". A similar mask, described by François Neyt as the "white man" is in the collection of the Louvain University museum.



144

A FINE CHOKWE AEROPHONE

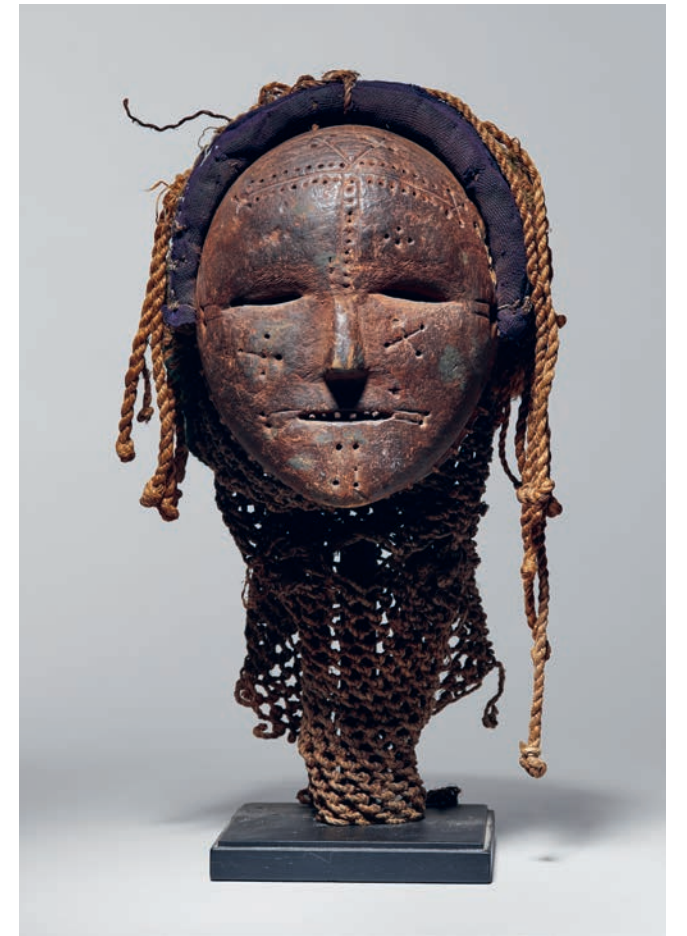
Angola
Wood
H 24 cm

Provenance
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

Cf. Marie-Louis Bastin in the journal of the African Music Society, 1992

€ 1,200 – 1,500

When they go hunting, the Chokwe used this whistle to communicate with their companions and to call their dogs. The aerophone can be varied by fingering the two tubular lateral holes situated on the neck of the pot-bellied whistle, typical of the Chokwe. Formerly in war, they were used to encourage the men to march to battles.



145

A LUENA/LOVALE MASK

Zambia/Angola
Wood, fibers
H 20 cm

Provenance
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 2,500 – 3,500



146

AN EARLY LUVALE MASK

Angola/Zambia

Wood, fibers

H 26 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 2,200 – 2,600

Like the Pwo masks from their neighbours, the Chokwe, the Pwevo is a female character representing the ideal woman, responsible for the musical accompaniment of the rituals and dances.

They are central to the Mukanda festival, an initiation period that has an educational function of transmitting practical survival-skills as well as knowledge about nature, sexuality, religious beliefs and the social values of the community.

147

AN EARLY SAKALAVA FEMALE FIGURE

Madagascar

Wood

H 95 cm

Provenance

Georges Vidal, Cannes

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1971

Published

Daniele Grassi, Strutture, Milano,

Vanni Scheiwiller, 1976 p.71

€ 3,000 – 4,500

The Sakalava are the largest and most diverse people on the western coast of Madagascar, the result of a number of royal dynasties and kingdoms.

Like the other Madagascar peoples, the Sakalava honor their ancestors with figures on wooden posts.

Sakalava wood sculptures, usually in the form of birds or nude female and male figures (sometimes erotically embracing), are placed on the tombs of high-ranking individuals. Typically the female figure is larger, more elaborately carved and more prominent than the male. This is because they are not representations of individuals but signs of fertility, erotic force and especially the life cycle.



AN EXCEPTIONAL TCHOKWE PWO MASK

Angola

Wood, fibers

H 24 cm

Provenance

Hans Himmelheber Heidelberg, field
collected between May 1938 and July
1939

Collection Kegel-Konietzko, Hamburg

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 8,000 – 12,000

This Pwo maidens mask is field collected by the famous ethnographer Hans Himmelheber. Himmelheber undertook some of the first anthropological research trips to the Ivory Coast (1933 and 1934), Ghana, Angola and the Congo (1937–1939). His ethnological collection is among the finest in the collection of the in Basel Museum of Cultures.

This example of the Pwo mask show delicately Inscribed motifs on the mask's forehead and cheeks in a classic graphic designs that aesthetically enhanced the woman's beauty as well as signs of ethnic identity. The central cruciform on the forehead has been interpreted as a cosmogram while the markings on either cheek are described as a solar rays joined by tears. Chokwe masks are often performed at the celebrations that mark the completion of initiation into adulthood. That occasion also marks the dissolution of the bonds of intimacy between mothers and their sons. The maternal pride and sadness of this important event is alluded to by this stylised tear motif.





149

AN EARLY GYRIAMA FIGURE

Kenya

Wood

H 118 cm

Provenance

Probably collected in situ by Marc Leo Felix in 1973

Phillipe Guimiot, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1974

Published

D. Grassi, Strutture, Vanni Scheiwiller Editore Milano 1976 p. 101-103

€ 3,500 – 4,500

The Giriama peoples carve wooden sculptures in the form of flat chip carved posts called Kikango. Most of these have flat stylized heads but others, made for wealthy and prestigious members of the community, are more elaborately carved with three dimensional heads. The sculpture's purpose is not to be a portrait or mark the location of a physical body but as to offer a place for the spirit. It seems that the tall posts are erected only for men, and specifically for those who were wealthy. They are not permanent memorials, they can only be moved once and are then left behind as the farm is relocated, and are kept only as long as the individual is remembered.



150

AN UNUSUAL ZULU SCEPTER OR KNOBKERRIE

South Africa

Wood, skin

H 65 cm

Provenance

Pierre Dartevelle, Brussels 1990

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1990

€ 1,500 – 1,800

The Zulu were known for their fierceness in battle. They used different clubs for fighting, including throwing clubs and scepter like clubs.

The name Knobkerrie derives from the African/Dutch word knoop "knot" and the indigenous Nama/Khoekhoe word Kierie which means staff or walking stick.

This was likely to be a ceremonial weapon, for a prestigious member of the community.

151

AN OLD AND RARE MAKONDE MASK “MAPICO”

Rovuma river, Tanzania

Wood

H 21 cm

Provenance

Pierre Darteville, Brussels

Grassi Collection, Tervuren since 1995

€ 2,500 – 3,500

This very old mask represents a spirit woman, whose characteristics are recognizable by the clearly protuberant lip plug and tearholes. These spirits (midimu) masks would have appeared in initiatory ceremonies and during certain festivals.

Face masks are more typical of Tanzanian Makonde (as opposed to Mozambican helmet masks). The large ndona (lip plug) and multiple ear plugs and lack of facial tattoos are typical of this small ethnic group.



152

AN EXCEPTIONAL
BONGO FEMALE
FIGURE

Sudan

Stone

H 51 cm

Provenance
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Grassi Collection, Tervuren

€ 8,000 – 12,000



153

AN IMPORTANT
BONGO SUDANESE
STONE SCULPTURE

Sudan

Stone

H 38 cm

Provenance
Pierre darteville, Brussels
Collection Grassi, Tervuren

€ 5,000 – 6,000

The Bongo people are a population of hunters and farmers, and were estimated in the second half of the 19th century, by the Zandé kingdoms. Today the Bongo live in communities scattered throughout south-western Sudan. Still today, a Bongo man acquires prestige in his lifetime through and those in the community with the highest respect were honored upon their death by sculptures, either in wood or stone.

Like the giriama posts from Kenya, these figures were not seen as a portrait or mark the location of a physical body but as to offer a place for the spirit. It seems that the posts are erected only for men, and specifically for those who were wealthy. They are not brought along but left behind as the farm is relocated, and are remembered only as long as the individual is remembered.



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III. The Completion of the auction transaction after the allocation of the lots

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- o to dissolve the purchase agreement by simple written notification, without any prior notice of default and without any intervention by the courts. Lempertz can reoffer and resell the lot at an auction; and/or
- o to claim damages for non-performance from the buyer in default, such as – but not limited to – the payment of the difference between the agreed purchase price and the new purchase price of the lot after a new auction, plus the cost of resale Under no circumstances the defaulting buyer is entitled to the possible surplus when the lot is sold at a higher purchase price at the new auction; and/or
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LEMPERTZ
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Absentee Bid Form auction 1284, Brussels
Art of Africa, the Pacific and the Americas,
31.1.2026

Aufträge für die Auktion 1284, Brüssel
Art of Africa, the Pacific and the Americas,
31.1.2026

Lot	Title Titel	Bid price € Gebot bis zu €

The above listed bids will be utilized to the extent necessary to overbid other bids. The bids are binding, the listed catalogue numbers are valid. The commission and value added tax (VAT) are not included. The bidder accepts the conditions of sale. Written bids should be received by at latest the day before the auction.

The used items shall be sold at a public auction in which the bidder or purchaser may personally participate. The provisions regarding the sale of consumer goods shall not be applicable according to § 474 par. 1 sentence 2 of the German Civil Code (BGB).

Name		
Address		
Telephone	Fax	E-Mail
References and identification (ID card / Personalausweis) may be required for new clients		
Date	Signature	

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Datum und Unterschrift:

OLD MASTERS AND 19TH CENTURY
21 MAY 2026, COLOGNE

INVITATION TO CONSIGN
oldmasters@lempertz.com



JAN DAVIDSZ. DE HEEM STILL LIFE WITH FLOWERS AND FRUITS ON A STONE LEDGE. Oil on canvas. 87,3 x 67,2 cm.
RESULT € 3,55 Mio

ASIAN ART JUNE 2026, COLOGNE

INVITATION TO CONSIGN

asian@lempertz.com



AN INDIAN MINIATURE PAINTING DEPICTING THE RETURN OF THE HERD AT THE SACRED HOUR.

Opaque pigments and gold on paper. Circa 1805. ESTIMATE € 15,000 – 25,000

DECORATIVE ARTS 20 MAY 2026, COLOGNE

INVITATION TO CONSIGN

decorativearts@lempertz.com



AN ARTS AND CRAFTS SILVER GEM-SET PEPPER CASTER, CHARLES ROBERT ASHBEE FOR THE GUILD OF HANDICRAFT, LONDON 1900. Icons of British Modernism – Silver from the Seawolf Collection, Part II. Height 7 cm, weight 38 gr. ESTIMATE € 1,400 – 2,000

Venator & Hanstein

Buch- und Graphikauktionen

SPRING AUCTIONS 2026

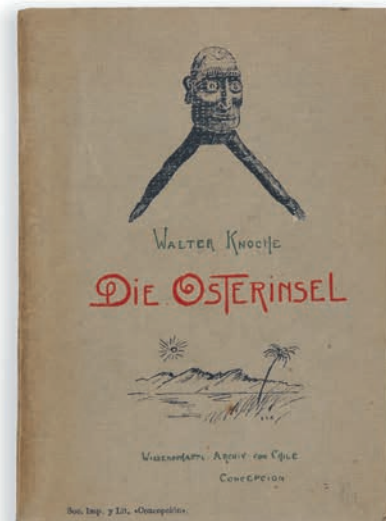
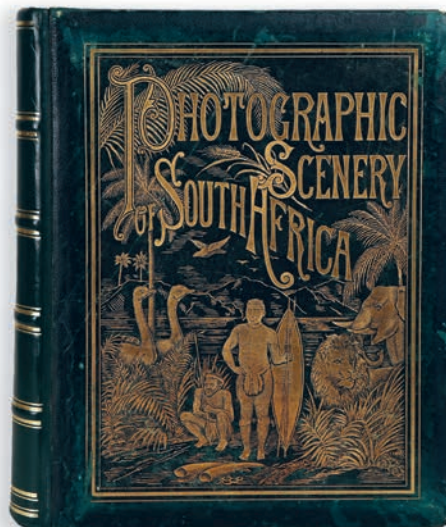
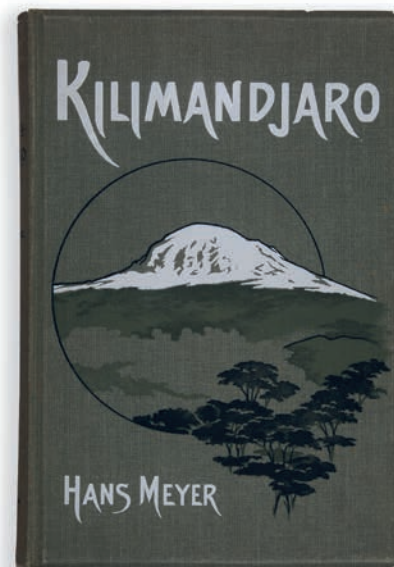
19 MARCH HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION

20 MARCH BOOKS, MANUSCRIPTS, AUTOGRAPHS, OLD PRINTS

21 MARCH MODERN PRINTS, CONTEMPORARY PRINTS

Consignments are welcome until the end of January.

Outlook on the auction on 19 March



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Farsettiarte

ITALIA
CASA ▲ MILANO CORTINA
2026
OLYMPIC GAMES



MILANO CORTINA 2026

WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES | FEBRUARY 6 – 22

WINTER PARALYMPIC GAMES | MARCH 6 – 15

ON THE OCCASION OUR GALLERY IN CORTINA WILL BE THE OFFICIAL HEADQUARTERS OF CASA ITALIA

WE LOOK FORWARD TO WELCOMING YOU DURING THE GAMES



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