

UZURI WA DUNIA





UZURI WA **DUNIA**

BELGIAN TREASURES



Didier Claes
Curator

BELGIAN TREASURES



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Nous poursuivons en Belgique notre tradition de soutien de projets culturels et philanthropiques et sommes aujourd'hui particulièrement heureux de parrainer la Brussels Non European Art Fair, une des plus importantes manifestations d'arts non-européens.



Introduction

Uzuri Wa Dunia, «beauty of worlds» in Swahili: the title of the exhibition that invites us on a voyage around the world to experience the «beauty of the world, beauty of Africa»...

From Mexico to Oceania, the colors, forms and patina of these works of art and the emotion they convey call out and speak to us. They are the distant echoes of long lost and ancient civilizations that continue to move us.

Belgium is a land of collectors with a deep appreciation of artistic creations from abroad, particularly from the Congo due to a shared history. Our small country possesses a museum that houses the most important collection of art from Central Africa in the world (RMCA Tervuren). Not surprising then to find Belgians at the forefront of collecting this form of African art.

The 20th century saw the creation of important private collections across the country, notably Alexis Van Opstal in Rhode-Sainte-Génèse, Jef Vanderstraete in Lasne and Willy Mestach in Brussels. They were built with the help of those first dealers: the Claes brothers and Henri Pareyn in Antwerp, Jeanne Walschot and Emile Deletaille in Brussels. Continuing the tradition of this period of discovery and gravitating to the Impasse Saint-Jacques were Martial Bronsin, Pierre Dartevelle, Marc Leo Felix. They were joined several years later by Pierre Loos.

Major temporary exhibitions have from time to time revealed this passion, bringing together many objects that for the most part were unknown to the public eye: *Art nègre* in 1930, *Kongo-Kunst* in 1937/1938, *L'art au Congo* in 1958, *Sculptures africaines, nouveau regard sur un héritage* in 1975, *Utotombo* in 1988 and *Masterhands* in 2001.

During our exhibition certain objects are being shown for the first time such as the extraordinary ivory Lega mask. Preserved for more than a century with a Canadian family, it is now preciously kept by a Belgian collector. It is a pleasure to present an object of this caliber with the marvelous patina attesting to its great age.

I wish to thank those who have helped me, directly and indirectly, to make this project a successful one. In particular I am grateful to those lenders who were kind enough to entrust me with their treasures...

Didier Claes

President of Bruneaf
Curator of the exhibition

Inleiding

Uzuri Wa Dunia, «de schoonheid van de werelden» in het Swahili: een titel van een tentoonstelling die ons uitnodigt voor een reis rond de aardbol om deze «schoonheid van de wereld, schoonheid van Afrika» te ontdekken...

Van Mexico tot Oceanië zijn we aangetrokken door de kleuren, de vormen, de patina's en de expressie van hun kunst. Ze zijn de afspiegeling van verre, vaak oude en soms verloren beschavingen die ons nog altijd beroeren.

Als blijk van erkenning van de artistieke creaties uit andere contreien, in het bijzonder uit Congo waarmee ons land een historische band heeft, is België uitgegroeid tot een land van verzamelaars. Ons kleine land kan aldus bogen op een museum met de grootste verzameling Midden-Afrikaanse kunst ter wereld (KMMA Tervuren). Belgen staan dan ook op de eerste rij van de liefhebbers van traditionele Afrikaanse kunsten.

Tijdens de hele 20^e eeuw werden zodoende grote collecties samengesteld: Alexis Van Opstal in Sint-Genesius-Rode, Jef Vanderstraete in Lasne, Willy Mestach in Brussel, daarin begeleid door de eerste handelaars: de gebroeders Claes en Henri Pareyn in Antwerpen, Jeanne Walschot, Emile Deletaille in Brussel, de «grote ontdekkers» van de Sint-Jakobsgang, Martial Bronsin, Pierre Dartevelle, Marc Leo Felix, waarbij een paar jaar later Pierre Loos de rangen heeft vervoegd.

Hun passie kwam ten volle tot uiting tijdens grote tijdelijke tentoonstellingen: *Art nègre* in 1930, *Kongo-Kunst* in 1937, *Kunst uit Kongo* in 1958, *Afrikaanse Beeldhouwkunst* in 1975, *Utotombo* in 1988 en *Masterhands* in 2001, waar toen objecten werden getoond die meestal geheim werden gehouden ...

Tijdens onze tentoonstelling worden een aantal werken voor het eerst getoond, zoals dit buitengewone ivoren Legamasker, dat meer dan een eeuw in een Canadese private collectie werd bewaard en vervolgens in handen van een Belgische verzamelaar belandde. Dit stuk verrukt ons wegens zijn ongelooflijke zuiverheid en zijn prachtige patina, getuige van zijn ouderdom.

Graag bedank ik allen die mij persoonlijk en indirect hebben geholpen om dit project tot een goed einde te brengen, in het bijzonder de bruikleengevers die mij in alle vriendschap hun schatten hebben toevertrouwd ...

Didier Claes

Voorzitter van Bruneaf
Curator

Introduction

Uzuri Wa Dunia, «beauté des mondes» en swahili: un titre d'exposition qui nous convie à un voyage à travers le globe pour expérimenter cette «beauté du monde, beauté d'Afrique»...

Du Mexique à l'Océanie, les couleurs, les formes, les patines de ces œuvres, leurs expressions, nous interrogent, nous parlent. Elles sont le reflet de civilisations lointaines, souvent anciennes et parfois éteintes, qui pourtant nous touchent.

La Belgique s'est construite terre de collectionneurs, par la reconnaissance des créations artistiques venues d'ailleurs, et en particulier du Congo auquel l'histoire l'a lié. Ce petit pays s'est ainsi trouvé doté d'un musée conservant la plus importante collection d'art de l'Afrique centrale du monde (MRAC Tervuren). Aussi, les belges ne pouvaient que se situer en première ligne parmi les amateurs des arts rituels d'Afrique.

Tout au long du XX^e siècle, de grandes collections ont ainsi été constituées: Alexis Van Opstal à Rhode-Saint-Génèse, Jef Vanderstraete à Lasne, Willy Mestach à Bruxelles, accompagnés en cela par les premiers négociants: les frères Claes et Henri Pareyn à Anvers, Jeanne Walschot, Emile Deletaille à Bruxelles, les «grands découvreurs» de l'Impasse Saint-Jacques, Martial Bronsin, Pierre Dartevelle, Marc Leo Felix, rejoints quelques années plus tard par Pierre Loos.

De grandes expositions temporaires ont occasionnellement révélées cette passion: *Art nègre* en 1930, *Kongo-Kunst* en 1937/1938, *L'art au Congo* en 1958, *Sculptures africaines, nouveau regard sur un héritage* en 1975, *Utotombo* en 1988 et *Mains de Maîtres* en 2001, rassemblant des objets dont la plupart sont souvent tenus secrets...

Lors de notre exposition, certaines œuvres seront montrées pour la première fois comme cet extraordinaire masque Lega en ivoire, conservé durant plus d'un siècle dans une famille canadienne puis jalousement gardé chez un collectionneur belge. Cette pièce nous ravit pour la première fois de son incroyable pureté et de sa merveilleuse patine attestant de son ancienneté.

Je tiens à remercier tous ceux qui m'ont aidé personnellement et indirectement à mener à bien ce projet, en particulier les prêteurs, qui m'ont fait l'amitié de me confier leurs trésors...

Didier Claes

Président de Bruneaf
Commissaire de l'exposition

Dogon figure

Mali

Wood

H: 86 cm

Probably before the 16th C.

Provenance:

Pierre Harter collection, Paris

Private collection, Brussels

Publication:

Blom H., *Dogon images and tradition*, 2010

Photo Paul Louis

Attributed to the pre-Dogon people, this sculpture with a hermaphrodite appearance (beard and breasts) has an eroded surface covered with a thick crust of a sacrificial nature. This object was carved by an artist who took into account the natural form of the wood to determine the shape. This movement is echoed by the tilt of the head and the angle of the headdress.



Dogon figure

Mali

Wood

H: 78 cm

C14 dating: 1820 +/- 40 years
(C14 Zurich, Dr. Bonani, ETH n°30296)

Provenance:

Emile Storrer collection, Zurich, 1958
Charles Ratton collection, Paris, 1959-1961
Private collection, 1962-2012
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Publications and exhibitions:

Bassani E., *Arts of Africa. 7000 ans d'art africain*,
exhibition catalogue, Grimaldi Forum, Monaco,
juillet-septembre 2005, p.188, n°72a.

Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'invisible, exhibition catalogue,
Musée d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux, mars-août 2011, p. 79.

Photo Paul Louis

This piece undoubtedly belongs to the production of an artist active in the region of N'duleri toward the end of the 17th century or the beginning of the 18th century. He is usually called the «Master of the Slanted Eyes», a diagnostic feature of his work. There exist four or five other examples of works attributed to this artist or his workshop (e.g. inv. 70.1999.9.2, musée du Quai Branly collection).

The figure's worn arms accentuate the elongated silhouette, highlighting the use of volumes, in particular, the chest decorated with engraved motifs. The features of the face, with its characteristic arrow nose, are framed by an elaborate coiffure and enhanced by a shiny, double-spiral metal earring.





Bamana *Ci-Wara* crest

Mali
Wood, cowries
H: 54 cm

Provenance:

Bernard et Bertrand Bottet collection,
Nice, avant 1960
Bernard de Grunne, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Photo Paul Louis

Ci-Wara crests are among the most famous types of masks in African art. This figure represents a female antelope (shell ear ornaments) which normally formed a couple with a male counterpart in a codified choreography for different occasions: agrarian celebrations, secular entertainment and annual lunar calendar ceremonies. Originally fastened to a wicker headdress, this is a «vertical» piece: narrow with large horns projecting upwards.

The stylized sculpture of the animal is treated very schematically with a «Z» line profile. Virtually abstract, the balanced composition of the form is particularly striking seen from the front. It fully reveals the mastery of animal art that the Bamana sculptors developed around their mythology.



Bamana *Suruku* mask

Mali

Wood

H: 46 cm

Provenance:

Dr. François Ouzilleau collection,
Director of the Institut Pasteur, Paris, ca 1910-
1920

Private collection

Photo Paul Louis



This «hyena» mask (*Suruku*) is sculpted in the style of the Koulikoro region north of Bamako. The animal head has a concave face under a projecting forehead in which the round eyes and the long bridge of the nose are handled in relief. The rectangular mouth is wide open to underscore the gluttonous nature of the animal whose importance is symbolized by the sculpted protuberance between the two pointed ears. This represents the tuft of hair taken by the hunter just after the animal's death to counter possible revenge by the animal. This substance is then incorporated in the fabrication of power objects.

Lobi *bateba phuwe* figure

Burkina Faso
Wood, metal, sacrificial crust
H: 78 cm

Provenance:
Private collection, France
Private collection, Brussels

Photo Paul Louis



This sculpture beautifully combines two characteristics of Lobi statues: an archaic quality and a sense of controlled movement. Statues (*bateba*) of this type (*phuwe*) are usually in a static defensive position. This statue, however, is differentiated by the upward movement of the head. The features of the face are also exceptionally well rendered.

The Lobi placed these statues on altars where they were honoured with sacrifices to protect their owner from witchcraft.



Lobi figurine

Burkina Faso

Ivory

H: 9,5 cm

Provenance:

Private collection, Belgium

Photo Paul Louis



Lobi ivory figurines are quite rare. This one works within the canon of wood statuary: a round head, static forward stance and no ornamentation.

The red colour of the materials (darker in the hollows) was no doubt obtained by repeated anointing and provides a special vibrancy to this tiny sculpture.



Grebo/Kru mask

Liberia/Ivory Coast

Wood

H: 61 cm

Provenance:

Sale «Art Primitif» Loudmer, Paris,
9 decembre 1989, lot 137.

Private collection, Belgium

Publication:

Burssens H. & Neerman M., *African
Faces*, Tielt, Lannoo, 2008, n° 19.

Photo Hugo Maertens/*African Faces*
Uitgv. Lannoo nv Tielt 2008



This large mask is remarkable for its structure: it is nearly oval in shape and the thin walls give volume. The flat face with projecting features (tubular eyes, nose and mouth) has a large, slightly rounded forehead. The composition is both simple and expressive and is characteristic of the works of the peoples living in the forest areas of western Ivory Coast and Liberia.

Dan mask

Ivory Coast

Wood

H: 28 cm

Provenance:

Robert Duperrier, Paris

Vigorelli Family collection, Bergamo

Sindika Dokolo collection, Luanda

Photo Dalton Somaré



This is a typical example of the famous Dan mask aesthetic of western Ivory Coast. However, the exceptional sweating of the black and shiny patina sets it apart. The sculpture is also unusually naturalistic in its treatment of the eyes, nose and mouth, which gives the face a very personal expression.

Yaure mask

Ivory Coast
Wood
H: 41 cm

Provenance:

Maurice Nicaud collection, Paris
Chambaud collection, Brussels

Publication:

Meauzé P., *L'Art Nègre. Sculpture*,
Paris, Hachette, 1967, p. 164

Photo Paul Louis



Yaure masks are usually recognizable by the notched edge around the face. The expression is usually peaceful and inward looking. This is achieved through the eyes with half-closed lids. The smooth and uncluttered composition of these pieces is often enhanced with an element sculpted at the top of the coiffure. The crest usually includes horns, braids or an animal figure. In this case, the crest has three faces opposite each other. The hair intermingles to create a single braid in front.



Akan head

Ghana

Terracotta

H: 31 cm

Thermoluminescence dating: Late 17th C.

Provenance:

Private collection, Aruba

Private collection, Belgium

Private collection, the Netherlands

Ludo and Ria Schellens collection, Belgium

Photo Dos Winkel



The members of the elite Akan were traditionally portrayed in earthenware images which were used as memorials for second funeral rites. They were placed in a special area called *asensie*, place of pots. Those works demonstrate a real concern for individuality in features nuanced by the specific idealized Akan aesthetic: round face, coffee bean eyes representing the closed eyes of the dead, a short nose and a small mouth. In fact, individuality is effectively shown through the coiffure: in this case, elegant coils of hair drawn to the side of the head.



Fon *Bocio* figure

Benin
Wood, iron, aluminum, fiber,
empowering substances
H: 78 cm

Provenance:
Private collection, France

Publication and exhibition:
Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'Invisible,
exhibition catalogue,
Bordeaux, Musée d'Aquitaine,
Paris, Hazan, cat. 156, p. 167

Photo Hughes Dubois

This *Bocio* statue («wood spirit»), brandishing a knife with a large blade, is a guardian that protects sacred places and homes. It has two canvas pouches on its arm which probably contain «magical» substances and increase its symbolic power. The surface of the sculpture, covered with a sweating patina around the face and a reddish crust on the body, is testimony to the sacrifices made to it.



Oba head pendant mask

Benin Kingdom, Nigeria

Bronze

H: 17,1 cm

18th - 19th C.

Provenance:

Seized during the British punitive expedition in 1897

William Downing Webster (1863-1913) collection, Bicester, ca 1900

Charles Ratton (1895-1986) collection, Paris, 1961

Didier Claes, Brussels

Private collection, Brussels

Publications:

Webster W.D., 1900: cat. n° 29, pl. 34, n° 4

Bacquart J.-B., *L'Art tribal d'Afrique Noire*, Paris,

Thames & Hudson, 2010, p. 85.

Photo Studio Philippe de Formanoir - Paso Doble



This prestigious and symbolic object was used to indicate the status and rank of the notables of the Benin kingdom. The three associations of chiefs all had their seat in the Oba's palace. When a man reached the highest levels of the hierarchy, he ordered leather belt ornaments and a mask like this one, which he carried on his left hip. Although the masks are still being produced by members of the *Igun Eronmwon* bronze casters guild, there is no consensus about the identity of the person represented. Today, as in the past, the brightness and reflecting power of the metal finery is maintained by regular polishing. In this example, the necklace is circled with rings used to fasten chains. When the dignitary whirled his sword to honour the Oba, the jingling of the metal chains added to the spectacular effect of the object.

Ekoi monolith

Nigeria

Stone

H: 160 cm

Provenance:

Didier Claes, Brussels

Private collection, Belgium

Photo Alain Speltdoorn



The monoliths of north-east Nigeria were erected alone or in groups - often in circles - in special areas on the edge of the villages where community activities were held. The ceremonies called for the protection of ancestors or were initiation ceremonies for young people who demonstrated their strength by lifting rocks out of the water (from the tributaries of the Cross River) and by carrying them to the village where a sculptor would provide them with human features. Buried up to their navels, each sculpted stone represented an ancestor, a legendary or historical figure or an emblem of a secret society. This example is rather small and notable for its harmonious shape and the finely-detailed, high-quality sculpture.



Mumuye *lagalanga* figure

Nigeria
Wood
H: 92 cm

Provenance:

Edouard Klejman collection, New York/Paris
Galerie Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection

Publications and exhibitions:

Zuber J., «Du côté des collectionneurs», in
Gonseth M.-O., Hainard J., Kaehr R., *L'art c'est l'art*,
exhibition catalogue, Neuchâtel,
Musée d'Ethnographie, 1999, p. 185-190, pl. 28.
Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'invisible, exhibition catalogue, Bor-
deaux, Musée d'Aquitaine, cat. 89, p. 103.

Photo Roscan

The Mumuye live on the left bank of the Benue River. They cultivate a high-plain region scattered with groups of mountains and rocks. Their villages are organised in family groups called *dola* which consist of 5 to 15 households. Each *dola* has a hut dedicated to *iagalanga* statues.

Mumuye statuary is best-known for its impressive wood statues between 30 and 160 cm high with elongated bodies and a small face with, usually, large pierced ears or, as in this case, a sort of helmet. They represent a tutelary spirit rather than an ancestor and one of their roles was to ensure the well-being of people and families.



This male statue belongs to the stylistic repertoire of northeast Nigeria from which it differs, however, by its craftsmanship and wealth of detail. The crest of hair is highlighted by a motif of bumps representing curls (as is the beard). The distended earlobes have massive ornaments. The head is covered with a thick reddish crust.

The statues are supposed to portray ancestors, chiefs, their spouses and their servants and were used at the funerals of chiefs, to fight sickness (epidemics, droughts and wars) and to celebrate harvests.



Jukun figure

Nigeria
Wood
H: 66 cm

Provenance:

Collected by Ousmane, ca 1967
Private collection, France
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Bernard de Grunne, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Publications and exhibitions:

Photographed *in situ*
by Arnold G. Rubin
Art of the Benue valley,
exhibition catalogue, Los Angeles,
Fowler Museum/UCLA, 2001, p. 286.

David Adjaye's Geographics,
exhibition catalogue, Brussels, Bozar,
Milan, Silvana Ed., 2010, p. 198.

Photo Paul Louis



Both of these figures come from the same workshop and were certainly made by the same sculptor. The rudimentary pair is enhanced with «finery» made of brownish resin (necklaces, bracelets and belts). It seems that this material was used to attach the small red seeds (*abrus precatorius*). Their indentations are still quite visible on the scalp of the female statue. Contrasting with this finish, the red, shiny surface of the wood of the male statue is enhanced with an engraved motif of circle/dots on the stomach.

Although there is very little information about the meaning of these figures, they clearly reveal a number of influences (notably that of the Chamba) and must be interpreted within the context of the stylistic traditions of the entire region, east of the Benue in the middle section of Nigeria.

Pair of Vere figures

Nigeria
Wood, resin, seeds
H: 56 cm and 43 cm

Provenance:
Collected *in situ* by Martial Bronsin
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection, Brussels

Publication:
Von Lintig B., *Empreintes d'Afrique*.
L'art tribal au fil des fleuves, Milan,
5 Continents Ed., 2011, p. 193.

Photo Hughes Dubois





The detailed work of this powerful statue sets it apart from the usual Keaka style of statuary. The head has a sagittal crest in slight relief and round eye sockets. A finely striped motif is used for the scarification of the cheekbones and the ears are positioned slightly below. The mouth stands out: it is wide open and very deep with pointed teeth.

The body is equally fascinating in its stylized anatomy as is the presence of a child on the back of this obviously male statue (beard and apparent genitals).

That peculiar iconography is admirably enhanced by the expressive qualities characteristic of Keaka works.

Keaka figure

Nigeria

Wood

H: 57 cm

Provenance:

Martial Bronsin

Philippe Guimiot

Private collection, Belgium

Publications and exhibitions:

David Adjaye's Geographics,
exhibition catalogue,
Brussels, Bozar, Milano,
Silvana Ed., 2010, p. 343.

Arts de l'Afrique. Voir l'invisible,
exhibition catalogue, Bordeaux,
musée d'Aquitaine, Paris,
Hazan, 2011, cat. 87, p. 101.

Photo Paul Louis





Bamileke *Mupo* figure

Cameroon
Wood
H: 31,5 cm

Provenance:

Jacques Kerchache, Paris
Galerie Alain Bovis, Paris
Private collection, Sint-Niklaas

Publications and exhibitions:

Leuzinger E., *Die Kunst von Schwarz-Afrika*, Recklinghausen, 1976, p. 244, fig. P12.

Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'Invisible, exhibition catalogue, Bordeaux, musée d'Aquitaine, Paris, Hazan, 2011, cat. 98, p. 108.

Photo F. Dehaen - Studio Asselberghs

The use of magical statues was common in the highlands of Cameroon's Southwest Region.

Called *mupo*, they were used by Bamileke ritualists for healing rites and to ward off evil spells. They are believed to embody patients and often have a round stomach, an allusion to fertility, also a feature of the maternity statues of the region.

Mupo were made in different sizes. Smaller ones were held in the hand during propitiatory rituals and larger ones, like this one, were exhibited in the courtyard of the chieftom seat before ceremonies.



This is a statue of a woman with stocky arms holding an offering receptacle against her stomach. Despite many ritual subtractions (from the nose and mouth, primarily), the subtle, heart-shaped face characteristic of the statues from this region of equatorial Africa, remains apparent. The eye sockets are enhanced with pupils made of brass tacks. Their brightness (as well as that of the wood coated with oil) made the sculptures shiny and visible in the half-light. The statue signalled the presence of the relics and represented their guardian.



Reliquary guardian figure

Fang
Gabon
Wood, brass
H: 43,7 cm

Provenance:
Prof. André Leroi-Gourhan
collection, Paris
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Private collection, Brussels

Publication and exhibition:
David Adjaye's Geographics,
exhibition cat., Brussels,
Bozar, Milan, Silvana Ed.,
2010, p. 231.

Photo F. Dehaen -
Studio Asselberghs



Reliquary guardian figure

Fang
Gabon/Cameroon
Wood, metal
H: 51 cm

Provenance:
Dr. Maurice Girardin, Paris
Chambaud collection, Brussels

Photo Paul Louis

This reliquary guardian figure is carved in the *Ngumba* style. The sculpture, which represents a woman carrying a container with offerings, shows great formal cohesion.

The eyes (originally metal discs), the navel and the knees are sculpted in flat circular shapes which accentuate the overall geometrical effect. The limbs are short and oblong, contrary to the body, which is cylindrical and somewhat elongated. The rectangular mouth is open and reveals the shape of the teeth. The statue is covered with a beautiful dark patina.





This longiform statue was placed at the front of the reliquary box, as if sitting on its edge. It was held in place with a rod in line with the statue's spinal column. While many Fang works have a similar dark, shiny patina obtained with oil, this achieves unusual intensity in this figure. The shiny effect catches the light, enhancing the shape of the body. The round biceps, arm and leg muscles are highly stylized as is the face. The latter is extremely concave and makes the figure's profile unique.

Reliquary guardian figure

Fang, Gabon

Wood

H: 52 cm

Provenance:

Former collection of the painter René

Mendes-France, Paris, ca 1930

Jean Roudillon, Paris, 1975

Morris & Camila Pinto collection, New York

Armand Arman collection, Paris/New York

Alain de Monbrison, Paris

Collection Buchmann, Suisse (cf. lots 51, 106

et 107)

Private collection

Yann Ferrandin, Paris

Sindika Dokolo collection, Luanda

Publications:

Roudillon J., *7 chefs-d'œuvre de l'art nègre
provenant de l'ancienne Collection René
Mendès-France*, 1975.

Perrois L., *Arts du Gabon*, 1979, n° 51.

Guy Loudmer, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 31 mai
1983, n° 143 et couverture.

Alain de Monbrison: *Monbrison 1997*,
planches XII-XIII.

Buchmann, *Culture Myth Africa*, 2009,
p. 36-39.

Sotheby's Paris, 12 décembre 2012, n° 89.

Photo Hughes Dubois





This Kota Mahongwe reliquary guardian figure is notable for its arched structure, the beautiful setting of the metal elements and, especially, its unusual decoration with strips arranged on the upper part of the face in concentric sections and a forehead plate decorated with edges with a «repoussé» lozenge motif.



Reliquary guardian figure

Kota-Mahongwe *boho-na-bwete*
Eastern Gabon
Wood, copper and brass,
excavation's patina
H: 53 cm ; L: 21,5 cm

Provenance:

Jacques Kerchache, Paris, 1967
Arman collection, New York
Didier Claes, Brussels
Sindika Dokolo collection, Luanda

Publications and exhibitions:

Le M'Boueti des Mahongoué,
exhibition catalogue, Paris,
Galerie Jacques Kerchache, 1967,
nr 23, p. 26-27 and 76.

Chaffin A., «Art Kota», in *Arts
d'Afrique noire*, nr 5, spring 1973,
p. 12-43 (p. 29, drawing of this
piece by Françoise Chaffin).

Chaffin A. et F., *L'Art Kota, les figures
de reliquaire*, Meudon, Ed. A. & F.
Chaffin, 1979, n° 10, p. 87.

Arman et l'art africain, exhibition
catalogue, Marseille, MAAOA,
Musées de Marseille/MAAOA,
juin 1996, n° 90, p. 120.

Photo Studio Philippe de Formanoir - Paso Doble



Reliquary guardian figure

Kota/Sangu
Gabon

Wood, metal, bone
H: 29 cm

Provenance:

Private collection, collected before 1914
Galerie Alain Bovis, Paris
Private collection, Sint-Niklaas

Photo F. Dehaen - Studio Asselberghs

Sangu, or Sango, works are very recognizable within the rich iconography of reliquary guardian figures produced by the Kota of Gabon.

They have small faces with disc-shaped bone eyes which are often highlighted by fine, semi-circular eyebrows as shown here. The metal (plates, strips and wire) was hammered over a wood core whose elegant, lozenge-shaped base was used to fasten the bundle containing relics.



This naturalistic approach characteristic of the statuary of the ancient Kongo kingdom is frequently pointed out when *Phemba* maternity statues are discussed. In this respect, this work is iconic, the skullcap with embroidered motifs (*Mpu*), the sensitive shape of the face, the detail of the filed teeth and the finery (necklace, bracelets and ankle rings). The sculpture of the child was done with the same care, both in terms of proportions and position.



Phemba maternity sculptures were apparently tied to a female fertility cult, a domain in which the eldest midwives of the community were the ritual experts. While the purpose of these sculptures remains unclear, their iconography indicates the high rank and importance of the women represented.

Kongo /Yombe figure

of a seated mother
breastfeeding a child
DR Congo
Wood
H: 26 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Sindika Dokolo collection, Luanda

Photo Sindika Dokolo Foundation



Kongo stafftop figurine

of a kneeling female
DR Congo
Ivory, lead
H: 8,5 cm
18th - 19th C.

Provenance:
Private collection, Belgium

Publications and exhibitions:

Utotombo, l'Art d'Afrique noire dans les collections privées belges, exhibition catalogue, Brussels, 1988, p. 164, n° 205.

Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'invisible, exhibition catalogue, Bordeaux, Musée d'Aquitaine, 2011, cat. 225, p. 193.

White gold, black hands, Vol. 1, p. 132-133.

Photo Paul Louis



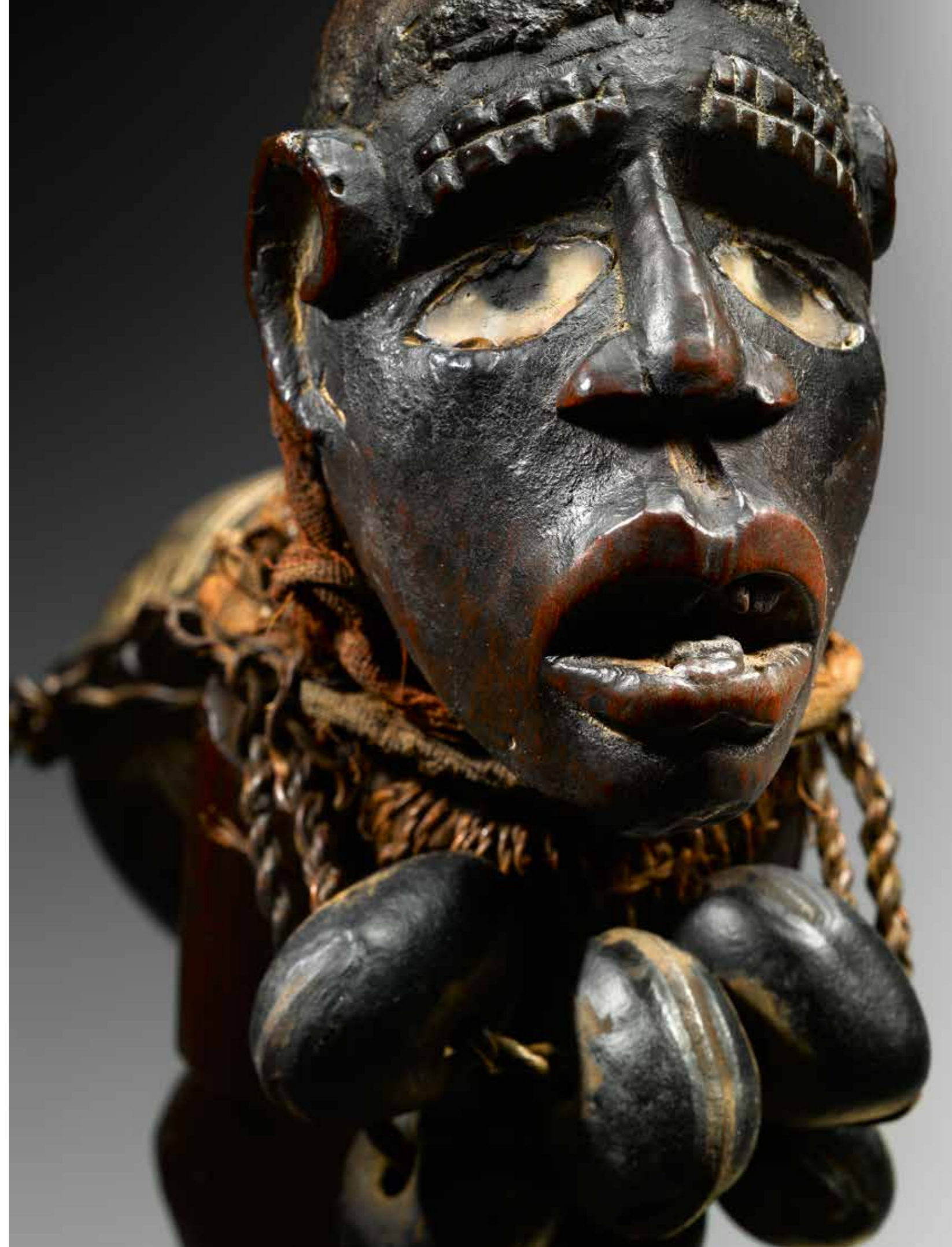
Empowered figure

Kongo, Vili?
DR Congo/Congo Republic
Wood, pigment, seeds, fiber, glass,
resin, empowering substances
H: 22 cm
18th- 19th C.

Provenance:
Philippe Laeremans, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Publication:
Neyt F., *Fétiches et objets ancestraux
d'Afrique*, Milan, 5 Continents,
2013, cover & nr 1, p. 18-19.

Photo Hughes Dubois



Iron-studded figure

Kongo, Sundi?, Manyanga? (Dondo-Kamba)
DR Congo / Congo Republic
Wood, pigment, iron, glass beads,
empowering substances
H: 100 cm
18th - 19th C.

Provenance:
Philippe Laeremans, Brussels
Private collection

Photo Paul Louis



Remodeled human skull

Kongo, Vili?, Lumbo?

RD Congo

Bone, wood, pigments, resin,
empowering substances, shells, mirrors

H: 21,5 cm

19th C.

Provenance:

Expédition « Croisière noire Citroën », 1924-25

Martin Doustar

Private collection

Publication:

Doustar M., *Golgotha: The cult of skulls*, 2014

Photo Paul Louis





Crucifix

Kongo
DR Congo / Angola
Wood, brass, iron
H: 35,5 cm
18th C.

Provenance:

Timmermans collection, Belgium
Didier Claes, Brussels
Sindika Dokolo collection, Luanda

Photo Studio Philippe de Formanoir - Paso Doble

Within the stunning corpus of Kongo crucifixes, the style of this one shows a concern for representing the body of Christ realistically: twisted arms, chest shape, ribs and stomach muscles. The face, hair and beard, as well as the draping of the perizoma are accurately rendered. Recent research (Julien Volper, 2013) cites the influence of Giambologna (1529-1608), an artist who created images of Christ with his head tilted and a lock of hair falling on his shoulder, in similar crucifixes which were apparently melted in Tumba and Kimpese.



Bed board for Nkita

Teke Tsaye
Congo Republic
Wood, pigments
L: 170 cm
20th C.

Provenance:
Södergren family collection, Sweden
Private collection

Photo Paul Louis



Tsaam, Ngongo (?) figure

of a standing female
DR Congo
Wood, pigment, reeds,
fiber, horn, seed
H: 36,5 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Céline Minet 1920's
Private collection

Photo Paul Louis



A number of cultural entities such as the Tsaam, Ngongo and Tsong lost most of their cultural identity during the 19th century turmoils. Yet some of their sculpture has survived. It is thus difficult to identify to which precise Kwango group this figure once belonged.

The Sengele live in the Bandundu province situated between the Congo River (west and north) and Lake Mai-Ndombe (east). They belong to the western-most part of the Mongo cultural area.

These statues, like the few other examples known, represent a couple. The sculptures are highly symmetrical. The figures stand rigidly and are extremely static. Although they were ritualistic figures, they were not intended to receive libations and were probably used for funerals.



Sengele couple

DR Congo
Wood, pigments
H: 53 cm & 55 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Acquired in situ
by Eugène Couplet,
Military Officer (1881-1909)
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection, Brussels

Photo Studio
Philippe de Formanoir
- Paso Doble



Ngombe Mask

Ubangi area
DR Congo/Central African Republic
Wood, pigments, shell, resin
H: 36 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Willy Mestach collection, Brussels
Private collection, Brussels

Publication and exhibition:

Mestach W., *L'intelligence des formes*,
exhibition catalogue, Brussels, 2007,
cat. 104, p. 222-223.

Photo Paul Louis



This important mask has over the last 40 years been attributed to the Ngbaka or Ngbandi people. Recent field research by H. Kellim Brown makes him believe that it is actually the Northern Ngombe who carved it.

Linked chief's stools

Ubangi, Ngombe
DR Congo
Wood, pigments
L: 197 cm
19th - 20th C.

Provenance:

Acquired *in situ*, 1922
S. Baccarach collection
Pierre Loos, Brussels
Peter Adler collection, London
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Publications and exhibition:

BADNEA, 1994, p. 5
Africa. The Art of a Continent,
exhibition catalogue, London,
Prestel, 1995, fig. 4.77, p. 306.

Photo Roger Asselberghs



Stools are emblems of chiefs. It is thus possible that a consecutive series of them represents a genealogy of local notables.



Ngombe - Moswea figure

of a standing male
DR Congo
Wood, pigments, shells, oil
H: 36,5 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Acquired *in situ*, circa 1952-1953
Private collection, Switzerland
Didier Claes, Brussels
Pierre Darteville collection, Brussels
Private collection, Brussels

Publications and exhibitions:

Wolfe, «Art and the Supernatural in the Ubangi District», in *Man* 55, 1955, pl. D.

Grootaers J.-L., *Ubangi, Art and cultures from African Heartland*, exhibition catalogue, Berg-en-Dal, Afrika Museum, 2007, p. 6, 44 & 112.

Neyt F., *Fleuve Congo*, exhibition catalogue, Paris, musée du quai Branly, 2010, p. 202, nr 137.

David Adjaye's *GEO-graphics*, exhibition catalogue, Brussels, Bozar, Milan, Silvana Ed., 2010, p. 314.

Photo Paul Louis

The Ngbaka are the most prolific people of the Ubangi region in terms of sculpture production. They can be recognized by the corpulence of the statues which generally have a round head. However, it also includes specific elements from other regional styles in the handling of the face (with, among other things, a vertical scarification motif and lip plug - removed) and of the body (notably, the position of the arms).

This sculpture could represent Seto, the brother-husband of Nabo, a mythological hero who plays a leading role in the Ngbaka thought system.



Ubangi figure

of an adorned standing human
DR Congo
Wood, pigment, fiber,
beads, copper, shells
H: 35 cm
19th - 20th C.

Provenance:
Meurrens collection, Belgium
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Photo Studio
Philippe de Formanoir
- Paso Doble



Ngombe figure

DR Congo/Central African Republic
Wood, woven fibre necklace
H: 51 cm

Provenance:

Collected *in situ* by E.F. in 1906
Private collection

Photo Paul Louis

The Ngombe are a Bantu people of the Congo numbering about 120,000. They live primarily in Equateur Province. They migrated from Lake Victoria during the 18th century and settled into their territory during the 19th century. They are ruled by a chief, a member of the *Elombe* warrior society who governs the heads of the villages and families. The Ngombe are often referred to as Bangala, the name given to all of the peoples living near the river in Equateur, of which the Ngombe are one of the major groups. Their culture is influenced by their Banda, Mbanza, Ngbaka and Ngbandi neighbours.

This statue was acquired in 1906 by a Belgian explorer and is among the few objects found in the field that did not become part of a museum collection. Very few items were collected due to the small artistic production in the region. The Ngombe do not have a sculpting tradition per se and this northern group is known to us because of a single sculptor. In the mid-1950s, the American anthropologist Alvin Wolfe described a hunter who had begun making ritual figurines, a new art form which was never copied by his peers. This type of figure, which is extremely rare, clearly did not represent an ancestor and did not shelter spirits. Its function seemed to be magical rather than spiritual and a ritual dance was sometimes done to music with the statue. The figure has scars on its forehead and stomach typical of the region. The face is rounded at the top and it ends with a rectangular chin. The eyes are close together above a triangular nose and the protruding ears are pierced. The coiffure crowning the figure is represented by a transversal crest cut perpendicularly in rows which fall to the back of the head. The female body with rounded forms is wide and massive and the sculpture is rigorously symmetrical. The entire object shows wear and a sacrificial patina, a sign that it was often used by the group, probably to improve hunting, the health of children and to increase future harvests.



Zande figure

of a standing human
DR Congo
Wood, pigments
H: 23 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Private collection, Belgium

Publications and exhibitions:

*Utotombo, L'Art d'Afrique noire dans
les collections privées belges,*
exhibition catalogue, Brussels,
1988, p. 261, n° 250

Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'invisible,
exhibition catalogue, Bordeaux,
Musée d'Aquitaine, 2011, cat. 177, p. 171

Photo Paul Louis





Zande figure

of an adorned standing male
DR Congo / Central African Republic
Wood, pigment, brass, copper, beads
H: 52 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Marc Leo Felix collection, Brussels
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Publication:

Von Lintig B., *Empreintes d'Afrique. L'art tribal au fil des fleuves*, Milan, 5 Continents, 2011, p. 81-82, nr 30.

Photo Hughes Dubois

This statue, cylindrical in shape like the log from which it was carved is, nevertheless, very sophisticated because of its rich ornamentation. The abundant finery is characteristic of some figures of the Zande *Mani Yanda* cult to which this piece is maybe related. *Yanda*, the spirit, gave its name to a secret society. Also known by the name *Mani*, it is one of the initiation societies still active in the Ubangui region.

Zande (?) figure

of a standing female (once part of a couple)
DR Congo / Central African Republic
Wood, pigment, fiber, iron
H: 58 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Acquired *in situ* by
Xavier Bellouard,
circa, 1917-1930
Philippe Guimiot, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Publication and exhibition:

Grootaers J.-L., *Ubangi*,
exhibition catalogue,
Berg-en-Dal, Afrika Museum,
Brussels, Fonds Mercator,
2007, fig. 4.46, p. 174

Photo Paul Louis



Mangbetu barkcloth

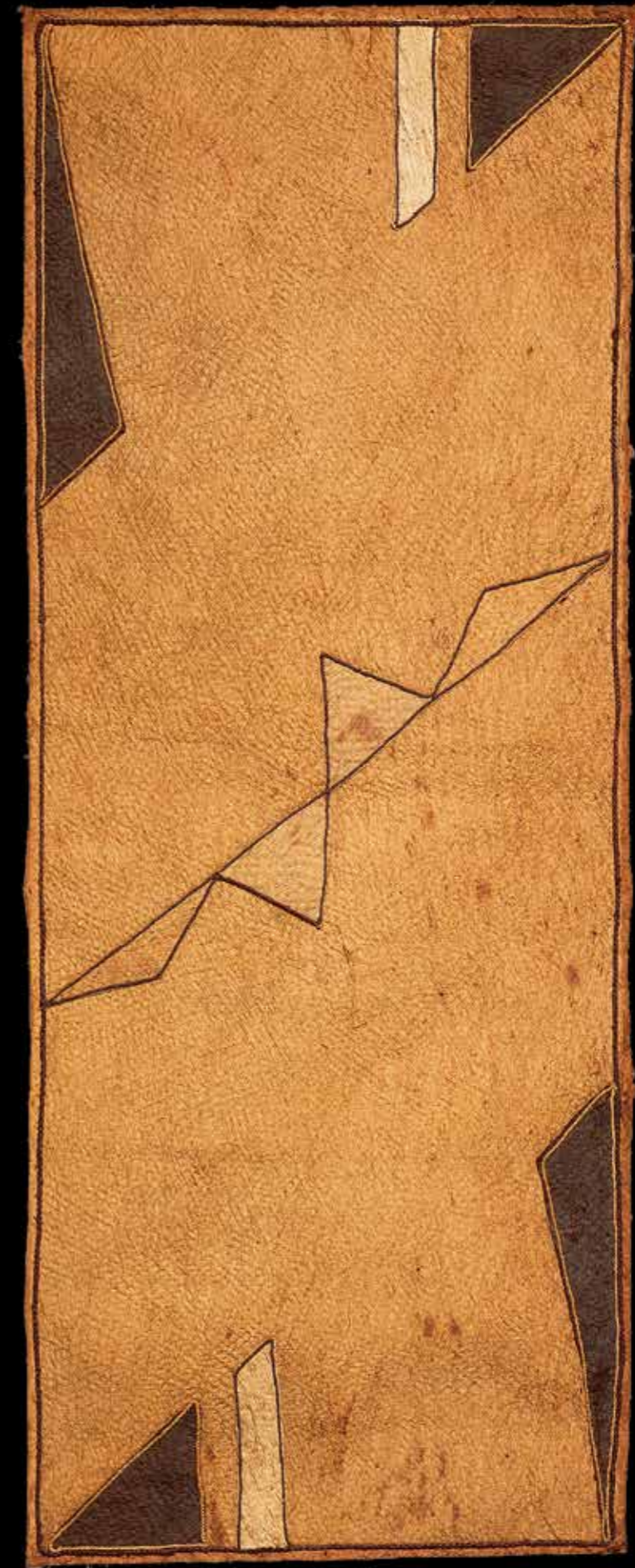
DR Congo
Bark, fiber, pigments
L: 70,5 cm
20th C.

Provenance:
Willy Mestach collection, Brussels
Clive Loveless, London
Private collection

Publication and exhibition:
Mestach W., *L'intelligence des formes*, exhibition
catalogue, Brussels, 2007, cat. 001, p. 47.

Photo Paul Louis

This particular *tapa* presents an unique and intelligent construction in its design, giving to our eyes the possibility to imagine what is actually represented. We will easily discover crosses, and then imagine the thin central zigzag could be images of birds. The similarity of design can be found in some Central African throwing knives, such as the *kipinga*.



Ritual aerophone

Pere
DR Congo
Wood, pigments
L: 94 cm
20th C.

Provenance:

Ethnographic Museum collection, Antwerp
Willy Mestach collection, Brussels, 1960's
Marc Felix collection, Brussels
Dr. Leon Wallace collection, Los Angeles
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Publications and exhibitions:

Nooter & Roberts, *African Art in
American Collections*, fig. 1529.

Musical Arts of Africa, Los Angeles County
Museum of Art, April-September 1992.

Music for the Eyes, Los Angeles County
Museum of Art, October 1999-May 2000.

Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'invisible, exhibition catalogue,
Bordeaux, Musée d'Aquitaine, 2011, cat. 137, p. 130.

Photo Paul Louis



This *Lukungu* ivory mask is remarkable for its large size. This is not an indication, however, that it was worn on the face. Maskettes (regardless of materials) are classified in the *bitungwa* category; they were pieces ordered by members of the *Bwami* for the last stages of their initiation.

The common name given to these ivory (and sometimes bone) masks literally means "skull". The masks were associated with the *lutumbo lwa kindi*, the last step and highest rank of *Bwami* initiation.

The ivory's dark red patina, the regular features (coffee bean eyes, mouth with teeth) and, especially, the heart-shaped face underscored by circle/dot motifs, confirm the importance of the piece which, more than likely, belonged to a renowned teacher of *kindi* rank.



Lega mask

DR Congo
Ivory
H: 20,5 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Collected *in situ* by captain
Sparrow before 1904
Christine Valluet, Paris
Ronnie Nasser, New York
Bernard de Grunne, Brussels
Private collection, Brussels

Photo Paul Louis





Hand-held mask

Lega
DR Congo
Wood, pigment, fiber
H: 30,8 cm
20th C.

Provenance:

Pierre Loos, Brussels
Private collection, Brussels

Publications and exhibitions:

Herreman F. & Petridis C., exhibition catalogue,
Antwerp, Ethnografisch Museum, 1993, p. 189.

Congo Mythical masks, exhibition catalogue, Brus-
sels, Bruneaf, 2009, p. 38-39.

Biebuyck D.P., *Ethique et beauté Lega au coeur de
l'Afrique*, exhibition catalogue, Brussels,
Galerie KBC, Gent, Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 2002,
cat. 49, p. 105.

Photo Paul Louis

Lega mask

DR Congo
Wood, pigment
H: 19 cm
20th C.

Provenance:

Charles Liebrechts (1858-1938)
René Withofs, Brussels
Pierre Dartevelle, Brussels
Benoit Rousseau collection, Belgium
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection, Sint-Niklaas

Publications and exhibitions:

BADNEA VIII, Brussels, 1998, p. 49.
Biebuyck D.P., *Ethique et beauté Lega au coeur de l'Afrique*, exhibition catalogue, Brussels, Galerie KBC, Gent, Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 2002, p. 86, n° 33.

Photo F. Dehaen - Studio Asselberghs



Lega mask

DR Congo
wood, pigments
H: 22,5 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Acquired *in situ* by territorial administrator
Raymond Hombert, 1927
Tom Hombert collection, Brussels
Alexis Bonew collection, Brussels, 24 February 1970
Private collection, Belgium

Photo Paul Louis



«Voiles de Raphael et *sfumato* de Léonard, les couches de patine se sont ici posées comme autant d'hommages.

Elles disent qu'en Afrique, que tu sois mythe, que tu sois masque, quand tu es important on te garde longtemps.

Cette œuvre bouleversante d'un artiste qu'on nomme Lega fait raisonner en moi l'écho d'une formule lapidaire - de Nietzsche, je crois - *Il n'y a pas de surface vraiment belle sans une terrifiante profondeur*».

Bernard Dulon



Lega mask

DR Congo
Wood, pigments, fiber
H: 27,5 cm
20th C.

Provenance:
Private collection

Publications and exhibitions:

Meauzé P., *L'art nègre. Sculpture*,
Paris, Hachette, 1967, p. 215

Cornet J., *Art de l'Afrique noire.*
Au pays du fleuve Zaïre, 1972

Kerchache et alii, *L'art africain*, Paris,
Citadelles & Mazenod, 1988, n°1008

Dulon B., Leurquin A., *Objetos signos de África*,
exhibition catalogue, Ibercaja,
Zaragoza, 2000, p. 19

Biebuyck D.P. , *Ethique et beauté Lega au coeur*
de l'Afrique, exhibition catalogue, Brussels,
Galerie KBC, Gent, Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon,
2002, cat. 52, p. 107.

Photo Hughes Dubois



Lega figure

of a standing male
DR Congo

Wood, pigments, fur
H: 35 cm
20th C.

Provenance:

Jef Vanderstraete collection, Lasne
Private collection, Belgium

Publications and exhibitions:

Biebuyck D.P., *Ethique et beauté Lega au coeur de l'Afrique*, exhibition catalogue, Brussels, Galerie KBC, Gent, Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 2002, cat. 64, p. 123.

Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'invisible, exhibition catalogue, Bordeaux, Musée d'Aquitaine, 2011, cat. 118, p. 119.

Photo Hughes Dubois





Lega figurine

DR Congo
Wood
H: 14,3 cm
19th - 20th C.

Provenance:

Collected *in situ* by Daniel P. Biebuyck, 1952
Karl Provost collection, USA
Auction Dallas, 1988
Alain Naoum, Brussels
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Private collection, Brussels

Publications and exhibitions:

Fagg W. & Plass M.W., *African Sculpture*,
1964, p. 38.

Trowell M. and Nevermann H., *African and
Oceanic Art*, 1968, p. 93.

Biebuyck D.P., *Lega Culture, and Moral
Philosophy among a Central African People*,
1973, p. 72.

Beaulieux D., *Belgium collects African Art*,
2000, p. 171.

David Adjaye's GEO-Graphics, exhibition
catalogue, Brussels, Bozar, 2010, p. 301.

Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'invisible, exhibition
catalogue, Bordeaux, Musée d'Aquitaine,
2011, fig. 119, p. 120.

Photo Vincent Everarts

This Lega figurine was collected by Professor
Biebuyck. A proverb was sung about this piece:
«The bat hangs its head because of the bad
words the sun says».



Lega figure

of a standing male
DR Congo
Wood, pigment
H: 29 cm
20th C.

Provenance:

Khepri Gallery, Amsterdam
Irwin Hersey collection, New York
Michel Beaujour collection, New York
Michel Boulanger, Liège
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Publication and exhibition:

Biebuyck D.P., *Ethique et beauté Lega au
coeur de l'Afrique*, exhibition catalogue,
Brussels, Galerie KBC, Gent, Snoeck-Ducaju &
Zoon, 2002, cat. 68, p. 122.

Photo Paul Louis



Mongo, Hamba (?) figure

of a standing male ancestor
DR Congo
Wood, pigments
H: 67 cm
20th C.

Provenance:

Pierre Darteville, Brussels
R. & N. Nooter collection, Washington
Felix collection, Brussels, inv. FC89 0012

Publication and exhibition:

Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'invisible, exhibition catalogue, Bordeaux, Musée d'Aquitaine, 2011, cat. 135, p. 129.

Photo Paul Louis





Mbole figure

of a hanged human
DR Congo
Wood, pigments
H: 85 cm
20th C.

Provenance:

Sir Francis Sacherell, 5th Baronet
(1892-1969), Villa, Tuscany, Italy.

Sir Reresby Sitwell (nephew of the above,
by inheritance in 1969).

Private collection, Tuscany, Italy
(acquired circa 1972 from the above
together with villa Monte Gufoni and its
contents)

Lance Entwistle, Paris

Didier Claes, Brussels

Private collection

Photo Hughes Dubois



Kela figure

of a standing male (once part of a couple)
DR Congo
Wood, pigments
H: 31 cm
20th C.

Provenance:

Van Rijswijk collection 1930's
Private collection, Brussels

Publication and exhibition:

Mestach W., *L'Intelligence des Formes*,
exhibition catalogue "Mestach l'africain",
Brussels, Bruneaf, 2007, cat. 101, p. 220.

Photo Paul Louis



Yaka mask

DR Congo
Wood, pigments
H: 27,5 cm
20th C.

Provenance:
Hy Zaret collection, USA
Private collection, Brussels

Publications and exhibitions:
Bursens H. & Neerman M., *African
Faces*, Tielt, Lannoo, 2008, n° 19.
Congo Mythical masks, exhibition catalogue,
Brussels, Bruneaf, 2009, p. 100-101.

Photo Hugo Maertens/*African Faces*
Uitgv. Lannoo nv Tielt 2008



Pende mask

depicting a male
DR Congo
Wood, pigments, fiber
H: 60 cm
20th C.

Provenance:
Timmermans collection, Belgium
Didier Claes, Brussels
Sindika Dokolo collection, Luanda

Photo Studio Philippe de Formanoir - Paso Doble

The *mbuya* (wooden masks) were brought out for celebrations in Pende villages. These included the closing ceremonies of the initiation rites (*mukanda*) of young boys. During the dance performance, a mask of this type, called *Giwoyo*, was set flat on the head of the person wearing it. They did not look through the eye slits of the mask but through the fibers of the plant «beard» which hung over their faces. The *Giwoyo* represent a corpse lying in a bed for their wake. Their arms extend alongside their stylized body which narrows and is upturned at the end to look like feet, as if covered with a shroud.



Pende mask

Pumbu type
DR Congo
Wood, pigments, fiber
H: 49 cm
Late 19th - early 20th C.

Provenance:
Pierre Loos, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Publication:
Strother Z.S., *Pende*, Milan,
5 Continents, 2008, pl. 21.

Photo F. Dehaen - Studio Asselberghs





Ikhoko

Pendant miniature mask
Pende, DR Congo
Ivory
H: 8,5 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
A. Stoclet collection
Private collection

Publication:
Gaffé R., *Sculpture du Congo Belge*, 1945.
Photo Paul Louis

Ikhoko

Pendant miniature mask
Pende, DR Congo
Ivory
H: 5 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Jeanne Walschot
Private collection

Publication:
White gold, black hands,
Vol. 2, 2011, p. 268-270;
Vol. 3, 2012, p. 12.
Photo Paul Louis

Ikhoko

Pendant miniature mask
Pende, DR Congo
Ivory
H: 6,5 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Private collection
Photo Paul Louis





Comb

Leele
DR Congo
Wood
H: 24 cm
19th - 20th C.

Provenance:

Pierre Loos, Brussels
Van Den Abbeele collection, Belgium
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Alexandre Claes collection, Brussels

Publication and exhibition:

Utotombo, l'Art d'Afrique noire dans les collections privées belges, exhibition catalogue, Brussels, 1988, p. 226, n° 208

Photo Paul Louis

Anthropomorphic adze

Leele
DR Congo
Wood, iron
H: 43,5 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Charles Ratton, Paris
Bernard de Grunne, Brussels
Private collection, Brussels

Photo Paul Louis





The abundance of sculpted detail and the rich copper ornamentation of this exceptional Kuba palm wine cup make it a remarkable piece among the extensive Kuba production of personal prestige objects.

The anthropomorphic treatment of Kuba cups are part of the refined possessions reserved for and used by chiefs and prominent citizens. The extremely stylized body with a very well-rendered silhouette is the foot of the statue and the head is the receptacle.

Dignitary's cup

for palm wine
Kuba
DR Congo
Wood, copper, pigments
H: 18 cm
20th C.

Provenance:
Loudmer, Paris,
auction « Arts Primitifs »,
5 December 1987, lot 310
Didier Claes, Brussels
Sindika Dokolo collection, Luanda

Photo Studio
Philippe de Formanoir
- Paso Doble

Container

Kuba
DR Congo
Wood, pigment
H: 19,5 cm
19th - 20th C.

Provenance:
Lenaerts collection, Brussels

Publication:
Binkley D. & Darish P., *Kuba*,
2009, p. 43 & p. 125.

Photo Paul Louis



Kongo Dinga mask

DR Congo / Angola
Copper
H: 27 cm
19th - 20th C.

Provenance:

Walter Bareiss collection, Connecticut / Germany
Private collection, Brussels

Publications and exhibitions:

Roy Ch.D., *Kilengi, African Art from the Bareiss Family collection*, exhibition catalogue, Seattle, 1997, p. 213.

Felix M.L., *Congo Mythical Masks*, Brussels, BRUNEF, 2009, p. 56-57.

Schaedler K.F., *Encyclopedia of African Art and Culture*, Munchen, 2009, p. 180.

Volper J., *Si vis pacem para artem: La création plastique chez les Salampasu*, Brussels, 2014, p. 99.

Photo Paul Louis





Lwalwa mask

DR Congo
Wood, kaolin
H: 36 cm
20th C.

Provenance:

Acquired *in situ* by Dr Emile Muller, before 1938
(transmitted by inheritance)
Adrian Schlag, Brussels
Renaud Riley, Brussels
Private collection, Brussels

Photo Paul Louis

The diagnostic manner in which the long, narrow bridge of this mask's nose rises vertically to join the top of the forehead at the edge of the hairline enables us to attribute this mask to the *nkaki* corpus. According to Ceyssens (1995), this characteristic visage is inspired by the beak of a forest bird that lives near the waterways and gave its name to this style.

Luba Kasai figure

of a standing male
DR Congo
Wood, pigments, fiber, nail
H: 60 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Collected by Pierre Loos, Brussels
Private collection

Photo Paul Louis



Up to today only four sculptures are known in this highly individual regional style that shares many features with Bena Lulua statuary.

Songye mask

DR Congo
Wood, pigment
H: 35,5 cm
20th C.

Provenance:

Joseph O'Leary (1911-1993) collection, USA
Private collection, USA
Didier Claes, Brussels
Sindika Dokolo collection, Luanda

Photo Studio Philippe de Formanoir - Paso Doble



The formal perfection of this mask helps us to identify and relate it with two other examples of the same type. One is kept in the Penn Museum at the University of Pennsylvania (AF115) and the other at the Quai Branly Museum, Paris (71.1947.91.53).

The three pieces share the same structure, with a wide, hemispherical forehead whose curves deepen toward the bottom of the concave face and the same concentric, parallel lines around the eyes which straighten out on the sides of the mask.

The evenness of the engraved motifs combined with the harmonious volumes of the face demonstrates the sculptor's great skill.

Songye figure

of a standing male
with sideways turned head

DR Congo

Wood, pigments, oil, horn, beads,
empowering substances

H: 48 cm (wood only)

60 cm (with horn)

19th C.

Provenance:

Private collection

Photo Paul Louis



Songye figure

of a standing male
DR Congo

Wood, pigment, metal, hide, oil,
empowering substances

H: 52 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Blanckaert collection, Belgium
Private collection, Sint Niklaas

Publications:

Neyt F., *La redoutable statuaire Songye
d'Afrique centrale*, Brussels, Fonds
Mercator, 2004, page 214, n° 181.

Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'Invisible, exhibition
catalogue, Bordeaux, Musée d'Aquitaine,
Paris, Hazan, 2011, p. 179, n° 197.





Songye figure

DR Congo

Wood, metal, beads, shells, horn,
vegetal fibers, empowering substances

H: 47 cm

19th C.

Provenance:

David Henrion collection, Belgium

Private collection, Brussels

Publication:

Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'Invisible, exhibition
catalogue, Bordeaux, Musée d'Aquitaine,
Paris, Hazan, 2011, cat. 204, p. 182.

Photo Paul Louis



Songye figure

DR Congo
wood, pigment, iron, horn, fibers
H: 34 cm
Late 19th C.

Provenance:
Karel Plasmans collection, Belgium
Alain Naoum, Brussels
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Photo Paul Louis





Songye figure

DR Congo

Wood, metal, horn, beads, furs, vegetal fibers,
empowering substances

H: 69 cm

19th C.

Provenance:

Hans Himmelheber collection, Germany

Marc Leo Felix, Brussels

Adrian Schlag, Brussels

Didier Claes, Brussels

Private collection, Belgium

Publication:

Neyt F., *La redoubtable statuaire Songye
d'Afrique centrale*, Brussels, Fonds Mercator,
2004, fig. 203, p. 239.

Photo Paul Louis

This large magical-religious Songye statue was made in a style specific to the central and southern Kalebwe in the centre of the Songye region. Its medium size indicates that the figure was likely dedicated to a collective purpose or to protect an extended family.

Songye figure

of an adorned standing male

DR Congo

Wood, pigment, hide, tacks, beads,
cowries, horn, fiber, empowering substances

H: 47 cm

20th C.

Provenance:

Acquired *in situ*, Tshofa région

Didier Claes, Brussels

Pierre Dartevelle, Brussels

Private collection

Publications and exhibitions:

Dulon B., Leurquin A., *Objetos signos de África*, Ibercaja, Zaragoza, 2000.

Baeke V., Bouttiaux A-M., Dubois H.,
Le Sensible et la Force, exhibition
catalogue, Tervuren, RMCA, 2004.

Arts d'Afrique, Voir l'invisible,
exhibition catalogue, Bordeaux,
Musée d'Aquitaine, Paris, Hazan, 2011.

Art Tribal magazine, 2004, nr 5,
cover & p. 68-69.

Neyt F., *Songye. La redoutable
statuaire Songye d'Afrique Centrale*,
Brussels, Fonds Mercator, 2004.

Pirat C.-H., *Du fleuve Niger au fleuve
Congo. Une aventure africaine*,
nr 115, p. 232-233.

Photo C.-H. Pirat





Songye figure

of a standing male
DR Congo
Wood, pigment, hide, tacks, beads,
cowries, empowering substances
H: 61,5 cm
19th - 20th C.

Provenance:

Karel Plasmans collection, Belgium
Patrick Caput, Paris
Alain de Monbrison, Paris
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection

Publications and exhibitions:

Neyt F., *Songye. La redoutable
statuaire Songye d'Afrique
Centrale*, Brussels, Fonds Mercator,
2004, p. 225.

Bacquart J-B., *L'art tribal d'Afrique
noire*, p.170, fig. C.

Matharan P. et alii, *Arts d'Afrique,
Voir l'invisible*, exhibition catalogue,
Bordeaux, Musée d'Aquitaine,
Paris, Hazan, 2011, p. 181.

Photo Alain Speltdoorn



Luba figure

of a seated bowl bearing female
DR Congo
Wood, pigment
H: 40 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
René Withofs collection
Blanpain collection

Photo Paul Louis





Luba neckrest

depicting a caryatid female

DR Congo

Wood, pigment, oil

H: 18,7 cm

18th - 19th C.

Provenance:

Julius Konietzko collection, Hamburg, by 1928

Elfriede Konietzko collection, Hamburg, by descent from the above

Mia and Loed van Bussel, Amsterdam, acquired from the above

Jutheau-de Witt collection, Paris, Collection van Bussel, June 25, 1996, lot 22

Myron Kunin collection, Minneapolis, acquired at the above auction

Tao Kereffoff, Paris

Sindika Dokolo collection, Luanda

Publications and exhibitions:

Supports de rêves, exhibition catalogue, Paris, Musée Dapper, 1989, p. 78.

Raoul Lehuard, «Les Ventes», *Arts d'Afrique Noire*, nr 99, Autumn 1996, p. 61.

Icons of Perfection: Figurative Sculpture from Africa, exhibition catalogue, Saint Paul, Hamline University Art Galleries, 2005, p. 53, cat. 36.

Photo Sotheby's

Luba neckrest

DR Congo
Wood, pigment, resin,
European wooden supporting base
H: 19 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Manu Rousseau, Brussels
Private collection

Photo Paul Louis





Hemba

Male/female Janiform figure

DR Congo

Wood, pigments, fiber,
empowering substances

H: 26 cm

19th C.

Provenance:

Felix collection

Private collection

Photo Paul Louis

Hemba figure

of a standing male ancestor
DR Congo
Wood, pigment, fiber
H. 75 cm
18th - 19th C.

Provenance:
Blanpain collection

Photo Paul Louis



Hemba figure

of a standing male ancestor
DR Congo
Wood, pigment
H. 77 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Joaquin Pecci, Brussels
Tao Kereffoff, Paris
Sindika Dokolo collection, Luanda

Publication:

Neyt F., *La grande statuaire Hemba du Zaïre*,
Louvain-la-Neuve, UCL, 1977, fig. II, nr 7, p. 111.

Photo F. Dehaen - Studio Asselberghs





Boyo figure

of a standing female ancestor (Bahutshwe)
DR Congo
Wood, crust of sacrificial substances, oil
H: 54 cm
18th-19th C.

Provenance:
J. Klejman, NYC
Private collection

Photo Paul Louis

Boyo figure

of a standing male ancestor
DR Congo
Wood, pigments,
empowering substances
H: 52 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Private collection

Photo Paul Louis



Basikasingo figure

of a standing male ancestor

DR Congo

Wood, pigments, empowering substances

H: 70 cm

19th C.

Provenance:

Max Grannick collection, NYC

Felix collection, Brussels, inv. FX 94 0056

Publications and exhibitions:

Phillips T. (ed.), *Africa. The Art of a
Continent*, London, 1999, p. 297.

Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'invisible, exhibition
catalogue, Bordeaux, Musée d'Aquitaine,
2011, cat. 123, p. 122.

Photo Paul Louis



Tabwa figure

of a standing male with Janus head
DR Congo
Wood, pigments, empowering substances
H: 76 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Barry Kitnick collection, Los Angeles
Philippe Guimiot collection, Brussels
Private collection

Publications:

Roberts A.F. and Maurer E.M., *Tabwa, The rising of a New Moon: A century of Tabwa art*, exhibition catalogue, The University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1985, p. 247, nr 179.

Roberts A.F., « Duality in Tabwa Art », in *African Arts*, 1986, Vol.19, nr 4, p. 26-35.

Exhibitions:

National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C, 1986.

The University Of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, 1986.

Royal Museum of Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium, 1986.

Photo Paul Louis





Chokwe female mask

DR Congo / Angola
Wood, pigment, metal
H: 24 cm
20th C.

Provenance:

Philippe Guimiot collection, Brussels
Roger Vanthournout collection, Izegem, Belgium
Didier Claes, Brussels
Private collection, Belgium

Publication:

Von Lintig B., *Empreintes d'Afrique. L'Art tribal au fil des fleuves*, Milan, 5 Continents, 2011, fig. 51, p. 127-129.

Photo Paul Louis

Chokwe figure

of a hand-clapping seated chief
Angola
Wood, brass
H: 25 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Private collection

Photo Hughes Dubois





Chokwe comb

depicting a seated mask-wearing male
DR Congo
Wood, pigments
H: 14,5 cm
18th - 19th C.

Provenance:
Joëlle Fiess collection

Publication and exhibition:
David Adjaye's GEO-graphics,
exhibition catalogue, Brussels,
Bozar, Milano, Silvana Ed.,
2010, p. 271.

Photo Paul Louis

Chokwe Comb

Depicting a standing male wearing
a *Ngaji* (judge's) mask
DR Congo / Angola
Wood
H: 19 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
James Willis, San Francisco
Pierre Loos, Brussels
BRUNEAF asbl, Brussels
Alexandre Claes collection, Brussels

Publications:
BRUNEAF catalogues cover, 2000-2006
Tribal Art magazine, Spring 2004, p. 34
(French edition)

Photo Paul Louis

The individual adorning this comb is extremely stylized and takes on the cylindrical shape of the handle perfectly (no arms, circular head and hair). It is an admirable example in miniature of the masterful tradition found in Chokwe statuary.



Mbunda mask

depicting a powerful male
Zambia
Wood pigments, fiber
H: 30 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Willy Mestach collection, Brussels
J.P. Jernander collection, Brussels
Philippe Guimiot collection, Brussels
Jacques Kerchache collection, Paris, France
Joaquin Pecci, Brussels
Private collection, France

Publications:

Bastin M.-L., *Introduction aux arts d'Afrique Noire*,
Arnouville, 1984, p. 382, nr 415.
Catalogue « 21 », Brussels, Joaquin Pecci gallery, 2010, ill. 21.
Bruneaf catalogue, Brussels, June 2010.
Photo F. Dehaen - Studio Asselberghs



Bemba figure

of a standing female
Zambia
Wood, pigments
H: 48 cm
20th C

Provenance:
Mon Steyaert
Private collection

Photo Paul Louis



This figure can be linked to the *Mwana Hiti*, female fertility dolls, found in Tanzania, Zambia, Angola and southeastern DR Congo.

Bisa figure

of a standing female
Zambia
Wood, pigments, brass
H: 62 cm
20th C.

Provenance:
Alain Guisson, Brussels
Private collection

Photo Paul Louis





Firefly cage

Nyamwezi
Tanzania
Wood, fiber, glassbeads
H: 42 cm

Provenance:

Gérard Wahl-Boyer, Paris
Pierre Darteville, Brussels
Private collection, Brussels

Publications:

Pirat C.-H., *Du fleuve Niger au fleuve Congo. Une aventure africaine*, nr 99, p. 214-215.

Photo C.-H. Pirat

Quadruped figure

Bull?
Karagwe
Tanzania
Iron
H: 41 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Pierre Dartvelle , Brussels
Felix collection, inv. FC850804

Publications:
*Utotombo, l'Art d'Afrique noire
dans les collections privées belges,
exposition catalogue, Brussels,
1988, p. 256, n° 272.*
*Arts d'Afrique. Voir l'invisible,
exposition catalogue, Bordeaux,
Musée d'Aquitaine, 2011,
cat. 152, p. 137.*

Photo Paul Louis



Blackened portrait mask

Makonde
Tanzania / Mozambique
Wood, pigments, human hair, resin
H: 26 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Private collection

Publications and exhibitions:

Kerchache J. et alii, *L'art africain*, Paris, Mazenod, 1988, p. 469, pl. 809.

Utotombo, *L'Art d'Afrique noire dans les collections privées belges*,
exhibition catalogue, Brussels, 1988, p. 115, pl. XXXXVII.

Bassani E., *La Grande Scultura dell' Africa Nera*, 1989, p. 273, pl. 144.

Meyer L., *Afrique noire - Masques - Sculptures - Bijoux*, 1991, p. 89, pl. 74.

Bassani E., *Le grand héritage*, 1992, p. 247, pl. 278.

Bouttiaux A.-M., *Persona-masques d'Afrique. Identités cachées
et révélées*, Africa-Tervuren, 2009, p.163 (X555b).

Photo Paul Louis





Jorai grave figure

Vietnam

Wood

H: 78 cm

18th - 19th C.

Provenance:

Field collected by Marc Leo Felix, 1974

Philip Lenaerts collection, Brussels

Photo Paul Louis

This anthropomorphic figure shows the crouching position in which the deceased of the highland Jorai (or Jarai) community were buried.

The sculptures were made for funeral ceremonies and were surrounding the tomb area. The advanced wear of this piece underscores its age.

Mundugumor flute stopper

Wusear, Mundugumor (Biwat)
male ancestor spirit figure flute stopper
Papua New Guinea
wood, *tridacna gigas* (tridacna),
cyprea moneta (money cowrie), feathers
H: 75 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Private collection

Publication and exhibition:
Océanie: signes de rites, symboles d'autorité,
Bruxelles, 2009, ill. 33, p. 52.

Photo Hughes Dubois

The flute stopper from Mundugumor is among the most readily recognized representations of Melanesian art. The male spirit figure was placed on top of a sacred flute, the stopper vertically inserted into the bamboo. These figures were in fact seen as ancestors speaking through the instrument.





Sawos ceremonial flute stopper

Middle Sepik region
Papua New Guinea,
Wood
H: 40,5 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

Clark Staples. Collected on the Brigantine Yankee
expedition (1956-1958) whilst circumnavigating the globe

Private collection, Belgium

Photo F. Dehaen - Studio Asselberghs

This stone carved figure is so finely realized that it can be considered a masterpiece of art from Papua New Guinea. A perfect figural composition with a fine patina, the importance of its function becomes evident as they were believed to be the receptacle for an ancestor spirit.

***latmul* ceremonial flute stopper**

Middle Sepik region
Papua New Guinea
Wood
H: 36,5 cm
19th C.

Provenance:

H.G. Beasley (1881-1939), United Kingdom
John Friede, Rye, U.S.A.
Lance Entwistle, United Kingdom
Wayne Heathcote, United Kingdom
Serge Schoffel, Brussels
Private collection

Publication:

Catalogue BRUNEF XXII, p. 120-121.

Photo F. Dehaen - Studio Asselberghs



Another finely stone carved flute stopper from the latmul people, depicting an important figure that represents an ancestor. As with the preceding example, flutes were believed to hold ancestor spirits and were highly imbued with magical power thus they were closed with a stopper when not in use.

Hand drum

Schouten Islands
Papua New Guinea
wood and snake skin
L: 58,5 cm
19th C.

Provenance:
Private collection, Sydney
Private collection, Antwerp

Photo F. Dehaen - Studio Asselberghs



Papua New Guinea drums are of three different types and the most popular style is this hourglass shape made from a single piece of wood; its top is covered with snake skin, the tapering surface to accommodate the hand of the musician. With the finely carved figures on the central handle, this drum is a wonderful example typical of the Schouten Island region.





Whakawae architectural Maori door panel

New Zealand
Wood
H: 72 cm
16th C. (C14 dating)

Provenance:
Serge Schoffel, Brussels
Private collection

Photo F. Dehaen - Studio Asselberghs

This remarkable Maori door panel of classic style depicts two superimposed figures conveying symbolic power reinforced by their facial expression. These architectural elements were reserved for chiefs houses and styles vary depending on the tribe from which they came. They were meant to make a great impression on the person viewing them.



U'u war club

Marquesas Islands
casuarina equisetifolia wood (tao wood)
L: 138 cm
18th C. or earlier

Provenance:

James Hooper collection, Arundel,
nr 446, acquired in London circa 1950's
Berend Hoekstra collection, Brussels

Publications and exhibitions:

*Arts and Artefacts of the Pacific, Africa and
the Americas, from the James Hooper
Collection*, London, 1976, pl. 55.

Bruneaf 2004

Photo Paul Louis



The *U'u* is certainly the iconic polynesian war club from the Marquesas Islands. Made out of the very dense tao wood, it depicts motifs of multiple faces in relief on both sides along with an incredibly refined and unique geometric design in the center. The perfect symmetry on this particular example shows the remarkable skill of the sculptor.



Rapa dance paddle

Easter Islands
Toromiro wood
L: 86,25 cm
18th C.

Provenance:
Gustave & Franyo Schindler, USA
COMMA collection, Belgium

Publications and exhibitions:
*Masks and sculptures from the Collection of
Gustave & Franyo Schindler, The Museum of
Primitive Arts, New York, 1966, ill. 43.*

*La Magie des Images. L'Afrique, l'Océanie
et l'Art Moderne. Fondation Beyeler,
Bâle, janvier 2009.*

*Regards de marchands. La passion des
arts premiers, Paris, septembre 2009.*

Photo Paul Louis



Considered among the most refined examples of wood sculpture from Polynesia, this *rapa* paddle becomes an extreme stylization of the human form. The upper part with eyes and nose represents the head, where the lower part suggests a body ended with a projection which could be seen as a phallus.



Monumental seated figure

Buff earthenware with traces of lime plaster
Totonaque, El Zapotal
Veracruz, Mexico
600-900 CE
H: 85 cm ; W: 57 cm

Provenance:

Emile Deletaille
Private collection

Publications and exhibitions:

Art de Mésoamérique - Méso-Américaine Kunst, Société Générale de Banque, Brussels, November 1976, illustrated nr 122 in the catalogue.

Indian Art from Mexico to Peru, Lajos Boglár and Tamas Kovacs, Budapest, 1983, nr 86.

Rediscovered Masterpieces of Mesoamerica, Berjonneau, Deletaille and Sonnery, Arts 135 Paris, 1985.

Trésors du Nouveau Monde - Schatten uit de Nieuwe Wereld, Brussels, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 1992, illustrated nr 112 in the catalogue.

Photo Roger Asselberghs

This beautiful statue representing an important dignitary was brought to Belgium in 1968 along with the even larger example acquired by (1971) and exhibited in the Musée Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire of Brussels. They relate stylistically and were probably made by the same artist. Both are similar artistic conceptions, the volume and execution of the hollow bodied figures and the sensitively rendered expressions of the face make these statues an exceptional example of the production of monumental sculpture from this region.

Standing Maya Lord

Alta Verapaz, Guatemala Highlands
Terre cuite with traces of polychrome
300-500 CE
H: 40,5 cm

Provenance:
Lin + Emile Deletaille
Private collection
Photo Roger Asselberghs



This majestic rendition of a Mayan dignitary is the proof of a flourishing ceramic tradition in the Guatemala Highlands.

Shown in all his regal splendour, this important figure is covered from head to toe in the classical Maya costume of the royal person. The zoomorphic headdress depicting Itzam Na, the supreme deity, conveys the divine right to rule and literally dominates the human form. We are overwhelmed, as the ruler, with the weight of symbolic power manifested by the elaborate clothing and royal accessories.



Incised Portrait mask

Olmec, found in Honduras
Jadeite
middle formative period 900-400 BCE

Provenance:

Emile Deletaille
Private collection

Photo Roger Asselberghs



Nothing creates more emotion than the stone sculpture from the Olmec civilization. Among the imposing and monumental examples of sculpture are the remains of the colossal heads from San Lorenzo and La Venta, two of several Olmec ceremonial centers that the re-discovery of in the 1960's provoked great interest and excitement. About the same time appearing on the International art market were a series of Olmec masks for the most part in jadeite or serpentine. In a totally different register from the large ceremonial center sculptures, these refined smaller ritual objects in precious materials are the proof of a sophisticated and highly organized society. This mask was purportedly found in western Honduras underlying the fact that these pieces might have been considered trade or prestige items and were found outside of the Vera-Cruz region where they were most likely fashioned. Nothing evokes more emotion than an Olmec mask, the portrait surely of an important dignitary, often with fine incised symbols on the cheeks, forehead and around the mouth as is the case with this mask. Often the iconography used was meant to confer symbolic power to the wearer and to re-enforce shared beliefs. They remain remarkable items of technical virtuosity and are the material remains of a glorious past civilization.

The Olmec civilization laid the foundation for establishing many traditions that continued throughout the pre-columbian cultures in Mexico and Central America. The idea of the sacred landscape, the practice of bloodletting to feed and honour the gods and metaphorically nourish the crops; the ballgame that cemented ceremony and social cohesion; the development of a system of symbols that evolved later into writing; all were adapted by subsequent societies. They remain elements and concepts that continue to attract us to this rich and fascinating culture.



Flying panel metate

Central Highlands-Atlantic Watershed, Costa Rica

volcanic stone

1-500 CE

H: 49 cm ; W: 44 cm ; L: 80 cm

Provenance:

Lin + Emile Deletaille

Private collection

Photo Roger Asselberghs

Carved from a single piece of volcanic stone, these ceremonial tables are considered major achievements of the Central Highland lithic tradition. More evolved and elaborate from their Nicoyan metate cousins, they remain testimony of a prolific stone production that continued for more than a thousand years. These "flying panels", so called due to their formal structure with a centrally carved iconographic field, in this case the bird depicted does just that. The piece is then sculpturally prefaced and supported by the adroitly fashioned long-beaked birds on the tripod legs and ends in a crenelated border around the table top. This completes the avian theme that is the typical defining factor of this highly important ritual object.

Standing figure

"Coquina", limestone formed of broken shell and coral cemented naturally together
Region of Diquis, Southwest Costa Rica
1000-1500 CE
H: 127 cm ; W: 36 cm

Provenance:
Lin + Emile Deletaille
Private collection

There are extremely few sculptures of this type although the form is known and several examples have been archeologically excavated. Some examples were assembled by Minor C. Keith (whose collection has been divided between the Brooklyn Museum, the American Museum of Natural History and the Museum of the American Indian). According to Keith, four of these figures were found not far from Palmar Sur. Another important archeologist working in the Diquis region in 1948 was Samuel Lothrop.

In his classification of the stone human figures he found, he speaks of what qualifies as "Ghost sculptures". He continues, "We employ this term to describe a curious group of carvings that exhibit the merest suggestion of shape. Perhaps they are unfinished or they may have weathered to their present form. At any rate, they are sophisticated and effective in conveying an abstract idea, often more so than the commoner stiff and traditional carved types".

The dating is unknown. It could be much earlier than the more classic Diquis peg figures and could be related to the abundant stone sculpture present in Costa Rica and Panama. What appears conclusive is the fact that this region produced extremely fine masters of stone carving developing a lithic tradition of great importance.



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UZURI WA DUNIA

Belgian Treasures

