

# NSU ART MUSEUM

## AFRICAN ART:

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

JULY 24 - OCTOBER, 2016

Extended Wall Labels



Areogun of Osi (Yoruba, c. 1880 - 1954) Osi-Ilorin, Ekiti state, Nigeria

*Ritual Bowl (arugba)*, early 20th century

Wood, indigo, camwood, pigment, encrustation NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen A. Spear A73.10

Bowls supported by a female devotee caryatid figure are found on the altars of shrines throughout the Yoruba area. On a collecting trip in 1960, Philip Allison photographed this bowl as it was being used in the Shango shrine, Idofin, Igbana, where it had served the same purpose for decades. Attributed to the great master carver Areogun of Osi-Ilorin, its smaller figures represent devotees bearing sacrifices to the god, Shango.



Unidentified Artist in style of Toibo of Erin (Yoruba, d. c. 1937) Erin or Ilobu ?, Nigeria

*Pair of Doors (ilekun)*, 1920's or 1930's Wood

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Henry R. Hope A73.1.a and .b

The Yoruba mark entrances to places of power or authority with elaborately carved doors, usually made in pairs. This pair of doors is carved in the Oyo style in its abundance of negative space, an absence of horizontal register lines, and faceted diamond-shaped motifs and eyes, all typical of carvings of the Oyo region. These were made in the Erin workshop of Maku (d. c.1915) and his son, Toibo (d. c. 1937). Maku was known for carving round headed figures with very large ears, but those by his son often lack ears and have slightly more elongated heads, suggesting these figures were carved by Toibo. The work of both artists can be found in Erin and its neighboring town, Ilobu.



Attributed to Agbonbiofe (Yoruba, d. c. 1945) or his workshop Efon-Alaye, Ekiti state, Nigeria  
*Helmet Mask, Standing Female Figure with 2 Children, Epa Masquerade*, 19th or early 20th century

Wood, pigments, coral beads

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. E. Zimmerman A75.26

*Epa* dance masks are washed and repainted annually, sometimes by their owners. Because of the accumulated layers of paint on this mask, which obscures its carvings, it was probably retired from dances, hence no longer washed, and was used as a shrine figure and continued to be painted. The face and mouth at the base of this mask, its regal bearing, flat-footed stance, and coral beads, suggest the hand of Agbonbiofe, the best known carver of the Adeshina family from Efon-Alaye, a town in southern Ekiti.



Unidentified Yoruba Artist Igbomina, Nigeria

*Figure of Female Twin (ere ibeji)*, early 20th century Wood, indigo, traces of camwood, beads  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Jeffrey Horvitz and Richard Horvitz A80.48

Although the identity of the carver of this twin memorial figure has not been established, specific characteristics of it can be associated with carvings from Igbomina: short legs, relatively naturalistic modeling and proportions, carved hip beads, hairstyle, and the triangular neck amulet worn point upwards. Figures by other Igbomina carvers also have waist beads that are worn high on the torso.

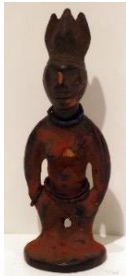


Unidentified Yoruba Artist Oyo, Nigeria

*Twin Figure with Cowrie Shell Tunic (ere ibeji)*, n.d. Wood, indigo, camwood, beads, cowrie shells NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A72.44

This figure can be identified as Oyo in style by the scars on the cheeks, its four-lobed hairstyle and set back ears. Oyo twin figures also frequently wear cowrie shell tunics.



Unidentified Artist in style of Abogunde of Ede (Yoruba, late 19th or early 20th century) Ede, Oyo, Nigeria

*Figure of Female Twin (ere ibeji)*, late 19th, early 20th century Wood, camwood, indigo, beads NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A72.43

In spite of the thick layer of camwood that obscures carving details, the stance and silhouette of this figure and its profile suggest it was carved by Abogunde, an important turn-of-the-century Ede carver.

When a twin dies, a memorial figure (*ere ibeji*) is carved, cared for, fed, clothed, and groomed as if a real person.



Unidentified Yoruba Artist Iseyin, Oyo, Nigeria *Divination Bowl*, n.d.

Wood, pigment

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A72.37

Ifa priests (*babalawo*) store divination objects such as palm nuts and cowrie shell chains in specially decorated bowls.



Unidentified Yoruba Artist Osogbo?, Nigeria

*Divination Tray (opon Ifa)*, late 19th or early 20th century Wood  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen A. Spear A72.99

The *babalawo* or diviner covers the tray's surface with powder where he makes a series of marks the number of which is determined by the configuration of eight cowrie shells on a chain or a handful of palm nuts that he manipulates in various ways. The number of marks indicates which verse of *Ifa* poetry will be spoken to guide the client.



Unidentified Dogon Artist Mali  
*Ceremonial Trough or 'Ark,'* late 19th or early 20th century Wood  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Jeffrey Horvitz and Richard Horvitz A80.21

This wooden container was made to hold animal meat sacrificed at a family altar dedicated to the creator god, Amma, and to the family's ancestors in gratitude for a successful millet harvest. The figures with raised arms are the eight *nommos* (mythic ancestors of mankind). The crocodile and zigzag lines refer to flowing water and spiritual energy.



John Leh (Kran, c. 1900 - 1987) Liberia  
*Standing Male Figure with Sword*, 1920's or 30's Brass, encrustation  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Levy A74.24

John Leh was one of several Liberian wood carvers who expanded his repertoire in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to include brass casting to meet the demands of a changing art market that increasingly included foreigners. Liberian army Frontier Force soldiers, such as the one shown here barefoot, wearing striped western-style pants, a traditional hat, and brandishing a knife were among Leh's favorite subjects.



Unidentified Dan Artist Liberia or Ivory Coast

*Mask with Slit Eyes (deangle)*, late 19th or early 20th century Wood

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Morris and Sylvia Ivanhoe A2002.1.4

Liberian masks are spirits who ask in dreams to become visible so they can participate in the human community. They have no pre-conceived appearance so the artist who carves the mask may base his image on someone he considers beautiful or perhaps an older, admired mask in a family's possession. Masks with slit eyes are considered gentle, feminine beings who assist with the initiation of young men.



Unidentified Kran or Geh Artist Liberia or Ivory Coast

*Mask with Round Eyes (tee gla)*, n.d. Wood, metal, cloth, fiber

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald E. Barab A93.24

Masks with circular, protruding eyes are considered fearsome and dangerous. The persona of the mask can change over the years as it follows the life trajectory of its owner, usually becoming wiser and more prestigious as a result of new responsibilities. New and different materials are added to modify its appearance as in the mouth area of this mask.



Unidentified Vai Artist Sierra Leone or Liberia

*Helmet Mask of the Women's Bundu or Sande Society*, c. 1900 Wood, fiber

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward R. Cayia A79.1

Helmet masks like this one are commissioned by officers in the Women's *Sande* or *Bundu* Society in the area of Sierra Leone and parts of Liberia. These are the only masks known to be worn by women in African dances. The dramatic hairstyles, high foreheads and hallmark ringed necks are symbols of socialization and beauty (equated with morality). The women officials who wear the masks supervise the initiation of girls into adulthood. These masks are carved by men who follow the instructions of the woman who commissions them, specifying details and other iconographic features that can be quite idiosyncratic.



Vandi Sona (Mende, c. 1885 - 1951) or his workshop Sierra Leone  
*Helmet Mask of the Women's Bundu or Sande Society*, early 20th century Wood  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A71.85

Vandi Sona was the head of a highly regarded early 20<sup>th</sup> century workshop that often received commissions for the most important masks, which interestingly, were less elaborate than lower ranking masks. The original glossy black surface on this fine, old, thinly carved mask is almost completely worn away, and the style of its coiffure is outmoded.



Unidentified Eastern Mende Artist Sierra Leone  
*Helmet Mask of the Women's Bundu or Santa Society*, n.d. Wood  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Morris and Sylvia Ivanhoe A2002.1.9

Real or carved amulets surround the head and neck of the dancer to calm her and instill confidence. Traces of liquid poured over the mask suggest that it may have been de-activated or de-sanctified during a ritual.



Unidentified Gola Artist Sierra Leone or Liberia  
*Helmet Mask (gbetu) of Men's Poro Society*, n.d. Wood  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen A. Spear A72.76

The *Poro* society is the male equivalent of the women's *Sande* society. The most important *Poro* masks are made of cloth and fiber, but the Gola *Poro* includes a wooden helmet used in a performance for entertaining that is similar to the women's helmet masks, except that the head is on top of a tall ringed neck. During the dance the mask appears to grow in height sometimes as high as ten feet.



Unidentified Mende Artist Sierra Leone

*Female Figure*, n.d. Wood

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Morris and Sylvia Ivanhoe A2002.1.3

Divination and healing associations led by women used Mende female figures, but some were also kept by chiefs and prominent women elders and displayed as examples of virtue. The figures illustrate human physical perfection and healthy qualities that the Mende equate with moral virtues and positive social values.



Unidentified Hemba Artist

Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C.) *Fragment of Male Ancestor Figure*, 20th century Wood

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Jeffrey Horvitz and Richard Horvitz A80.22

Although a number of Hemba artists have been identified by name, this figure cannot be linked to any of them. Yet, it seems to conform generally to the central Hemba style.



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Unidentified Lobi Artist Ivory Coast

*Male Figure (bateba) of a Spirit* (thil, pl. thila), n.d. Wood

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A73.15

Nature spirits carved in human forms serve as intermediaries between the spirit and human worlds.

Though they resemble humans, they are not portraits because portraying a person would be endanger them. The figure's foreign hat is called a *kepi* and indicates that this *thil* shares some of the authority of French colonial officials or the healing ability of French doctors.



Unidentified Southern Igbo Artist Nigeria  
*Male Shrine Figure (akusi)*, n.d. Wood, encrustation  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Vincent Coppola A75.31

Figures of various sizes represent a god, his family, and associated lesser spirits. They are regularly dressed in every day clothing and displayed outside their shrine homes near the market place so that they may participate in the life of the community.



Unidentified Mumuye Artist Nigeria  
*Male Figure*, mid. 20th century Wood  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Stephen A. Spear, and Mr. and Mrs. Irwin A. Weiser  
A71.38

Mumuye artists carve strikingly stylized human figures for a wide variety of purposes. These figures are characterized by an abundance of negative space, a slight asymmetry, or subtle twist that distinguishes them from the strict frontality of most African sculpture. Gender is often difficult to determine but this appears to be a male because of its traditional sagittal crested warrior's helmet with elongated earflaps (women have open ear lobes) and hint of an *Adam's* apple.



Unidentified Mambila Artist Cameroon



*Guardian Figure (tadep) for Storehouse of Suaga Association*

Wood, pigment

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A73.25

These guardian figures are either placed in nets hung like hammocks across the front wall of the shrine or are suspended from its eaves. They eventually succumb to weathering and fall to the ground, where they are left to decay.



Unidentified Kulebele Artist(s)

Senufo Area, Ivory Coast

*“Executioner” Figure Known as Kafigueledio* (alt. spelling, *kafigelejo*), 20th century Wood, cloth, cords, encrustation, feathers

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A72.116

The Kulebele artisans are a separate caste or group within Senufo society, and they have their own protective deity whose personality is very threatening. Because of the expansion of the art market in the 1950s and 1960s that now includes western patrons as well as traditional societies, such as the *Poro*, these Kulebele diety “executioner” figures are made more frequently, perhaps to protect themselves from the increased competitiveness of the art business.



Unidentified Artist Grassfields, Cameroon

*Horizontal Mask of Bush Cow*, 20th century Wood, polychrome

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A71.79

Though labelled as a bush cow, the identity of this mask is not clear because its head is too short and it lacks the textured area at the base of the horns. If its tapered teeth were not slightly threatening, it could be a domestic cow or a goat.



Unidentified Abua Igbo Artist Delta region, Nigeria  
*Head Crest with Aquatic Spirit*, 20th century Wood, fiber, glass  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. E. Zimmerman A75.28

Aquatic spirit masks drive away danger to protect the community. This fish spirit had been identified as a shark, but lacks the fin and multiple gill slits. It might be the voracious African tiger fish, a feared and respected creature of the delta region.



Unidentified Ijo, Ekpeye, or Abua Igbo Artist Delta region, Nigeria  
*Large Crocodile Figure, Articulated Jaw and Legs*, n.d. Wood, pigment  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A75.17

Masks of this size were probably held up for display by dancers on rafts. Those worn by dancers on land are smaller to not compromise the dancers' movements.



Unidentified Bwa Artist Burkina Faso *Crocodile Mask*, n.d.  
Wood, pigment  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A73.19

Animal spirits in central Burkina Faso are tutelary spirits who appear at a variety of important events, such as funerals of elders and agricultural ceremonies. The abstract geometric patterns on the head and snout allude to the various facial scars that identify an individual's family lineage. For the Bwa people, marks must be deep enough on the skull to allow ancestors to identify the deceased.



Unidentified Senufo Artist Nafanra area, Ivory Coast  
*Head Crest for Kwonro Festival*, n.d. Wood, basketry  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mrs. Edward H. Lawrence A75.2

Initiates celebrating graduation from the intermediate stage (*kwonro*) of initiation into the men's *Poro* society used to wear head crests, but they have not been part of such ceremonies for many years.



Unidentified Dogon Artist Mali  
*Kanaga Mask with Lattice Work Super Structure*, n.d. Wood, pigments, leather lashings  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Stephen A. Spear, and Mr. and Mrs. Irwin A. Weiser  
A71.54

At the conclusion of memorial ceremonies, dancers wearing *Kanaga* masks escort the dead souls out of the village. The mask's superstructure is varyingly interpreted by a Dogon as either an animal, bird, or abstract cosmic symbol, depending on his level of secret knowledge.



Unidentified Bwa Artist Burkina Faso  
*Broad Wing Plank Mask*, n.d. Wood, pigments  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Irwin A. Weiser A72.67

This broad-winged plank mask probably relates to birds because similar masks are known to display three or more small carved birds at the upper edge of its wings. It should not be confused with popular butterfly plank masks from this region because they have distinct identifying marks not seen here. Masks like this one may function as billboards for esoteric symbols, such as the "target" motifs that refer to sacred wells that never go dry because they were discovered by ancestors. The vertical lines divide larger (elders, wisdom) from smaller (less wise, un-initiated) patterns to indicate different levels of knowledge.



Unidentified Senofo Artist Ivory Coast

*Birds from Champion Cultivator's Staff*, n.d. Wood, iron

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen A. Spear A72.89

Awarded to a young man who wins the annual hoeing contest, these trophies are cherished for generations by the winner and his family. Birds hovering over the freshly turned ground are symbols of the beginning of the agricultural cycle.



Unidentified Guro Artist Ivory Coast

*Antelope Mask for Dye Masquerade*, 20th century Wood, pigments

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Stephen A. Spear, and Mr. and Mrs. Irwin A. Weiser

A71.10

*Dye masks* represent many different forest creatures, and their species are often easily identified by the curve and color of their horns, facial markings, ear shapes, and in this case, red-rimmed eyes. The mask is carved from very light-weight wood so that the dancer can move freely to mimic the animal's movements.



Unidentified Marka-Dafing Artist Burkina Faso

*Plank Mask*, 20th century Wood, pigments

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Stephen A. Spear, and Mr. and Mrs. Irwin A. Weiser

A71.27

These masks represent spirits of the bush or characters in clan histories.



Unidentified Kurumba Artist Burkina Faso  
*Antelope Mask (adone)*, 20th century Wood, pigments  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Morris and Sylvia Ivanhoe A2002.1.8

Although antelopes are probably best known for their association with agriculture because they are first seen with seasonal rains, they also are used at burials and annual memorial dance ceremonies. Today artists carve them for local use and the tourist trade.



Unidentified Mossi Artist Yatenga region, Burkina Faso  
*Antelope Mask with Plank Super Structure*, n.d. Wood, kaolin  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Irwin A. Weiser A72.68

Mossi masks combine qualities of antelope and plank masks to represent clan tutelary spirits, who escort corpses and dance at funerals of clan elders.



Unidentified Gurunsi (Vagala or Tampulma) Artist Northern Region, Ghana  
*Mask*, n.d.  
Wood, pigments, metal, fiber  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A72.153

This nature spirit mask is a combination of bush cow horns, warthog tusks, and circular protrusions (verruca) on either side of the snout.



Unidentified Gurunsi (Vagala or Tampulma) Artist Northern Region, Ghana  
*Mask*, late 19th or early 20th century Wood, pigments, iron, fiber  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Jeffrey Horvitz and Richard Horvitz A80.17

Hand forged iron nails or barbs appear in many very old, well-used masks from this region. Although the significance of the nails and barbs is uncertain, it probably has something to do with the spiritual activation of the mask.



Unidentified Loma Artist Liberia and Guinea  
*Mask of Okobuzagui, Nephew of the Great Spirit of the Forest*, n.d. Wood, metal, cowrie shells, fabric, sacrificial materials  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Morris and Sylvia Ivanhoe A2002.1.7

These masks are not worn by dancers, but function like sacrificial altars in ceremonies that “consult” their powerful spirit.



Unidentified Senufo Artist Ivory Coast  
*Horizontal Helmet Mask (kponungo)*, n.d. Wood, pigment  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Levy A74.21

This kind of mask is used principally at funerals where a *Poro* society elder’s corpse is prepared to become an ancestor. This one combines antelope horns, crocodile or hyena jaws, hyena ears, warthog tusks, and a human nose (plus an extra, more animal-like nose.) The chameleon and hornbill on its head are from the Senufo creation myth.



Unidentified Senuso Artist Ivory Coast

*Helmet Warthog Mask*, n.d. Wood, encrustation

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Irwin A. Weiser A72.56

This mask serves much the same purpose as the Senuso mask next to it but lacks the over-all splattering of red and white paint dots the Senuso apply to objects to transform them into spirit agents. The paint applied to this one has either disappeared over the years or was never applied to prepare the mask for use, which would mean it was never used.



Unidentified Igbo Artist Nigeria

*Helmet Mask (Mgbedike)*, 20th century Wood, pigments

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen A. Spear A72.87

*Mgbedike* masks are numerous and considered “heavy” or dangerous and function as complements to the white-faced maiden spirit (*mmuo*) masks for which the Igbo are famous. *Mgbedike* are large, dramatic, dark, and menacing and are often named and exhibit distinctive personalities. The dancer wearing this masks imitates the mischievous and destructive behavior of the monkey and hornbill displayed on it. Empty holes among the horns probably once held feathers or porcupine quills.



Unidentified Songye Artist

Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C.) *Male Kifwebe Mask*, 20<sup>th</sup> century Wood, pigments

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward R. Cayia A78.2

The specific tribe that carved this *Kifwebe* mask cannot be identified because both the Songye and Luba used them for male initiations. Songye masks generally have forms that are more exaggerated than Luba *Kifwebe*. Moreover, Songye carvers make masks for their own use and for the Luba. Male masks are characterized by a central crest, bolder stripes and more bulging features.





Unidentified Yaka Artist  
Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C.) *Mask for Mukanda Initiation Society*, n.d. Wood,  
pigments, cloth, raffia  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A72.24



Unidentified Yaka Artist Democratic Republic of Congo  
*Mask for Mukanda Initiation Society*, n.d. Wood, pigments, cloth, raffia  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A72.124

Young initiates carry these masks in front of their faces during “graduation” from bush school ceremonies. All masks are a little bit different from one another, especially in their superstructures. *Mukanda* officials choose artists to make them based on their reputations for creativity. Each mask is named and ranked and given to an initiate who has similarly been ranked for his learning and performance in bush school.



Unidentified Punu Artist Gabon  
*White Faced Okuyi Mask*, 20th century Wood, pigments  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Jeffrey **Horvitz** and Richard Horvitz A80.49



*Okuyi* is a masquerade, performed on stilts, of the *Mwiri*, formerly a powerful men's association still active in some parts of Gabon. Most of their masks have the identity of female ancestors, but about a third are male. They have no scars, a one or two-lobed coiffure (females have three-lobed coiffures), and a black collar may indicate a beard.



Unidentified Eastern Pende Artist Democratic Republic of Congo *Chief's Helmet Mask (kipoko)*, n.d. Wood, pigments  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Levy A74.20

Every chief has a *kipoko* mask and participates in the initiation graduation for boys. The mask symbolizes the chief's power to help, nurture, and provide for the needs of his people. The shelf-like beard may hold food, which he offers to initiates during the ceremony. Large eyes and ears indicate the chief's awareness of everything; the absence of a mouth shows his restraint. This mask has lost one of its ears.



Unidentified Bamileke Artist Bayangam, Grassfields, Cameroon  
*Door Post Displaying Biblical Subject, From Chief's House*, n.d. Wood  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Bequest of Frank P. Buck, Jr A82.7

This is the post of the left side of the Common House doorway from the palace compound of the Banyangam chief, photographed in place in the 1950s. Royal Grassfields doorways typically display standing male retainers, nude royal wives, defeated enemies, and animals symbolizing the ruler as a source of fecundity, life force, protection and moral authority. This imagery is combined here with Christian iconography to create a new and unique statement of royal prowess, possibly reflecting the activity of Christian missionaries in Grassfields kingdoms in the early 20th century.



Kum Chuo Njem or Chu Nde Kongha (Wum, both active 19th century)  
Western Grassfields, Cameroon  
*Door Frame, Probably for Kwifon Society House, 19th century Wood*  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. E. Zimmerman A74.3

In the Grassfields, the *Kwifon* organization, made up of elders from all the family lineages within a kingdom, is housed in the palace compound. Its symbol is the double gong seen at the top of each post. The pairs of dotted circles correspond to designs on the prestige hats of the elders; the rows of linked figures represent the people. Door frames in the Wum area are very similar stylistically because of the dominance in the 19th century of the artistic workshop led by two famous carvers, Kum Chuo Niem and Chu Nde Kongha. Their styles are indistinguishable.



Unidentified Nupe Artist Nigeria  
*Panel of a House Door, n.d. Wood, encrustation*  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Donald B. Hayden A72.1

The use of doors carved with Islamic and traditional imagery has declined in recent years, but was once the prerogative of local Nupe leaders and wealthy men. A writing board indicates that the owner is a literate Muslim, while sandals suggest wealth, and a necklace of amulets and individual gri-gri (isolated triangles) confer spiritual protection. Swords suggest authority, the snake and turtle at the bottom are traditional African symbols, and the knot motif and pangolin suggest wisdom.



Unidentified Igbo Artist Nigeria  
*Prestige Stool, n.d. Wood*  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Dr. Arthur L. Naddell  
A75.9

This elaborately carved stool identifies the owner as a member of the *Ozo* title taking society, an organization whose members advance through the society by earning increasingly significant titles.



Unidentified Fon Artist Republic of Benin  
*Prestige Stool*, 20th century Wood  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Jeffrey Horvitz and Richard Horvitz A80.47

In Africa, being seated is a sign of status and respect. The Fon people use stools of high, often round-sided seats. Caryatid stools are not common and clearly suggest the status of the owner.

Unidentified Bamum (?) Artist Grassfields, Cameroon *Man's Stool*, 20th century Wood  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Cummings, Jr. A72.16

Large, elaborately decorated stools are used on public occasions to impress guests or the audience, while smaller, simpler stools are used for every day. A man sometimes gives his small, personal stool to his bride.



Unidentified Bamum (?) Artist Grassfields, Cameroon  
*Large Food Vessel*, 20th century Wood  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A73.13

Ceremonial feasting is an important part of Grassfields politics, and serving bowls are often ornamented with royal motifs. This bowl was probably used for palm oil as it has a pouring spout and handle. These large bowls are placed on the ground.

Unidentified Female Artist Grassfields, Cameroon  
*Water Jar or Palm Wine Vessel*, 20th century Terra cotta  
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;  
Gift in memory of Steven Bowen and Mrs. Herbert  
A81.6

Pottery is usually made by women, and handmade clay pots are still used in Africa in spite of the importation of plastic and enameled metal containers. They are particularly popular as water storage jars because water remains cool from condensation through their porous walls. Pots of any description can be used as containers on an altar to hold offerings, libations, and other ritual materials.



Unidentified Kirdi Artist Northern Cameroon *Beaded Apron*, n.d.

Beads, cowrie shells, string

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Dr. Arthur L. Naddell A75.12

Beads and cowrie shells imply honor, respect, or special status. Young women wore skirts decorated with them on special occasions—marriage or the presentation of a new-born. In cultures with centralized authority, such as the Yoruba and in the Cameroon Grassfields, beads denote royal connections.



Unidentified Yoruba Artist Nigeria

*Diviner's Staff (orere)*, n.d. Forged iron

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, Jr. A72.135

Iron is earth transformed by fire into useful tools, implements, and currency. It is also used to imply authority and spiritual ability. This staff symbolizes a diviner in that it features a single bird perched on a disc above multiple bells. The bird symbolizes witchcraft whose magic the diviner can discover and overcome through his practice.



Unidentified Artist

Democratic Republic of Congo

*Iron Currency*, n.d. Forged iron

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Dr. Arthur L. Naddell A75.16

Iron can be forged into weapons for hunting and warfare, tools for agricultural use, and ritual implements. It is also forged into non-functional shapes and used as a form of exchange, most often as a bridal dowry.



Unidentified Dan Artists Liberia or Ivory Coast

*Hunting Shirt with Amulets*, 20th century Men's weave cloth, leather, cords

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale;

Gift of Jeffrey Horvitz and Richard Horvitz A80.23

This tunic is made of cloth known as men's weave (narrow strips of cloth sewn together to create a large piece of fabric). It may have had painted patterns, but they are now very faded. The packets are amulets or charms sewn around folded paper that contain either Koranic messages or animal parts that offer spiritual aid and protection for hunting in the "bush," a place that is literally and spiritually dangerous.



Unidentified Senufo Artist Ivory Coast

*Heddle Pulley*, n.d. Wood

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. E. Zimmerman A75.30

Men weave on a narrow strip loom with pulley holders that are often decorated with popular images such as this hornbill from Senufo mythology. Pulley decorations most probably reflect the status of their owner, the type of cloth being woven, or they may offer the weaver special spiritual protection or inspiration.

# NSU ART MUSEUM

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## FORT LAUDERDALE

### AFRICAN ART: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

July 24 – October 23, 2016

#### Introduction

This exhibition presents a selection of works drawn from the extensive Sub-Saharan, traditional African art collection of NSU Art Museum. Launched in 1971, the collection was formed through generous donations of collectors of African art who spent years assembling their private collections.

A significant number of works are attributable to specific artists and workshops rather than regions, which is unusual for Western collections. Africans knew the names and reputations of artists but their individuality was not stressed in their culture. Of more concern was who owned the work, and how it was used; its effectiveness was more important than who made it. Africans were more involved with the piece once it left the hands of its maker, and years of use often substantially transformed its appearance. At least two works in the exhibition have been documented in situ, while in use in Africa: a ritual bowl by Yoruba master Areogun (1880-1954), and part of a carved door frame by an unnamed but innovative artist of the Bamileke village of Bayangam.

Moreover, whether a mask, figure or door, the work was likely to have been the product of more than one person. African artists are usually trained in workshops, where they apprenticed for years, carefully observing and copying the techniques and style of the workshop's master and helping execute commissions. Creativity and departures from the norm were not necessarily discouraged, and the style of works from a particular region or even a particular workshop evolved over time. Contributing to the anonymity of African artists, is the tendency for carvers to work in seclusion, especially if they are working on a spiritually powerful piece. In some situations, Africans may deny human agency in the creation of a work altogether.

Not all African art is concerned with ritual and or spiritual practices. Status and prestige are important concerns as well and several works on display are representative of this aspect of African art. NSU Art Museum's collection is also expansive enough to allow for the exploration of African concepts of realism and the relationship of pattern and form. Both the concept of realism and the use of patterns can be sources of misunderstanding as Africans do not perceive them in the same way as Westerners. Nor do all Africans see things the same way either.

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Viewers should keep in mind that NSU Art Museum's African art collection is a composite of gifts from many collectors, and while extensive, does not exhaust the possibilities of either African imagery or ideas. This exhibition provides the museum the opportunity to evaluate its collection and establish a path for its growth and interpretation.

Organized by the NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale with guest curator, Marcilene Wittmer, Professor Emeritus and Curator, University of Miami, this exhibition has been made possible in part by Wells Fargo and the Wege Foundation

## **Status and Prestige**

Architectural decorations (#47, #48, #49) convey status, reputation, and prestige, as does body art, and the ownership and use of specially decorated objects, or those made of or decorated with certain materials. Gold, silver, or bronze can be limited to use by royals or those with royal associations. Beads are often used to indicate royal status, especially in the former Yoruba city-states in Nigeria and the small kingdoms in the Cameroon Grassfields. Non-centralized societies may use beads to indicate marriage or the hope for wealth. In the past, beads, cowrie shells, iron and textiles have functioned as currency, and their appearance in art suggests wealth or the ability to attain it (#57). Iron is linked to warfare, farming, and to rituals in which blood is let, and its presence in art relates to leadership, to people with specific knowledge, such as ritual specialists (#56).

Not all materials or decorated objects denote status. Plain pots are made for household use, while decorated pots are more likely reserved for special use, such as entertaining guests or being part of a bride's dowry. A plain or decorated pot holding drinking water or palm wine may also be placed on a shrine for holding ritual ablution liquids. Tools on looms such as heddle pulleys (#59) can be decorated with motifs intended to encourage a weaver, but they may also represent reputation or status.

Staffs (#56), stools (#50, #51, #52), pottery (#54), textiles (#58), ironwork, beaded objects, hats and body ornaments were possibly of more lasting significance to Africans than ephemeral masks or the more durable figures made and used for rituals.

## **Realism/Reality**

Although a great deal of African art derives from human form, specific people were almost never depicted before the Colonial era, when Africans began responding to the Western high regard for identity and specific anatomical features. When a figure is realistic, as in the Mende female figure (#17), it may not depict a particular person, but rather a timeless ideal form whose characteristics derive from local concepts of morality. A strong, straight body, powerful legs, high breasts, a serene expression, ringed neck and high forehead are signs of moral goodness, while scars and coiffed hair are symbols of status and social agreeability.

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The life of an African object is a more important index of its reality than its anatomy or who it represents, as it can change by what occurs to it over time. In speaking of Yoruba art, Henry Drewal explains: "Unlike in our own society, [art] may continue to undergo alterations in its appearance in response to the aesthetic preferences of its owners or caretakers, sometimes over several generations (#1 and #3). An object enters its unintended and final unchanging life stage, when it is collected or displayed rather than being used.

A Mende figure's degree of realism can indicate how much it was used in rituals where touching occurs that alter its appearance, and a patina accumulates (#17). Highly realistic, patina-free objects were probably not used but displayed by chiefs or prominent women elders as portraits or symbols of their roles in women's societies.

African animal masks are often difficult to identify or, if identifiable, are highly stylized or decorative composites of several different animal qualities (#39). Their characteristics are only important for what they symbolize or suggest. The Guro antelope mask (#32), which appealing but potentially dangerous, is more important as a "bush" spirit than for its realistic depiction of an animal.

Individuals' lives and moments in them are not important to Africans, and thus narrative seldom occurs in their art. Instead, forms are timeless and reflect the balance, harmony, perfection, and "coolness" of states of being. For example, the victory of a chief is not seen as an individual valorous act, but as an expression of his relationship to ancestors and his own spiritual devotion. Combinations of iconic images and motifs such as those on the Nupe door (#49), convey a more complete sense of the identity of the owner than would a realistic depiction of him.

### **Abstraction/Pattern**

Bold forms characterize African art, whose patterns energize or activate spiritually the forms they decorate to convey meaning that is sensed rather than defined. Ron Eglash describes them as: "Repetition with revision." Geometric but irregular patterns repeat with subtle changes that cannot be pinpointed; occasionally they are abrupt, dramatic, and noticeable. In either case, they pulsate with a life of their own that compliments or transcends surface.

Painted patterns can accentuate or obscure form (#34, #33, #37). Some, like the painted spots on Senufo masks (#39) and other ritual objects, indicate and create a spirit state rather than an everyday reality.

A motif or pattern in Western art usually has a known and specific meaning. Those of African patterns change or are altered by the status or level of understanding of the person explaining them (#29, #30). Some can be quite complex, as Christopher Roy explains: "Each of the geometric patterns on a mask is a symbol in a phrase that



describes the meaning and importance of the mask itself. When all of the symbols are taken together, they give the mask a name that refers to a lesson in the proper conduct of life. It is clear that the last language is complex and carefully worked out.”

Forms are also independent of specific identity or specific meaning and are commonly exaggerated for emphasis. Large heads, for example, indicate the seat of the soul (#4, #18)), while tiny or missing mouths convey self-control. (#46). Full breasts suggest nurturing and sharing the life force (#1). Curved, softly faceted surfaces, or the highlights and shadows of sharply meeting planes animate objects (#40). Forms obscured by layers of paint or encrusted with accumulations of offerings evoke mystery and danger. Sharply revealed, crisp forms express clarity, social stability, control.

### **Collecting and Collectors**

Africa is a huge continent with hundreds of cultural variations. For every generalization that can be made about African art, one can find an exception to it. While Westerners seem uncomfortable with ambiguity, Africans prefer its nuanced multivalences as reflections of shifting spiritual states and secrecy. While seeing African art raises many questions, answer to them are hard to find. In past decades, Western scholars sometimes sought more profound meanings in objects than exist, such as the philosophical interpretations of Dogon art by French scholars, such as Marcel Griaule.

Most of the works in the NSU Art Museum collection date from the period in which collectors sought and acquired ideal, pure examples of African tribal styles that were made and used by Africans, preferably in a ritual context. There was little concern for the individual identity of the artists because collectors wanted to establish and define the parameters of a tribal style, and they questioned the authenticity of idiosyncratic works. Current scholarship has led to the identity of specific workshops and their artists, which has led to more nuanced assessments of the meaning and the use of the objects, and those in the collection can now be understood through this new and increasingly appreciative lens.