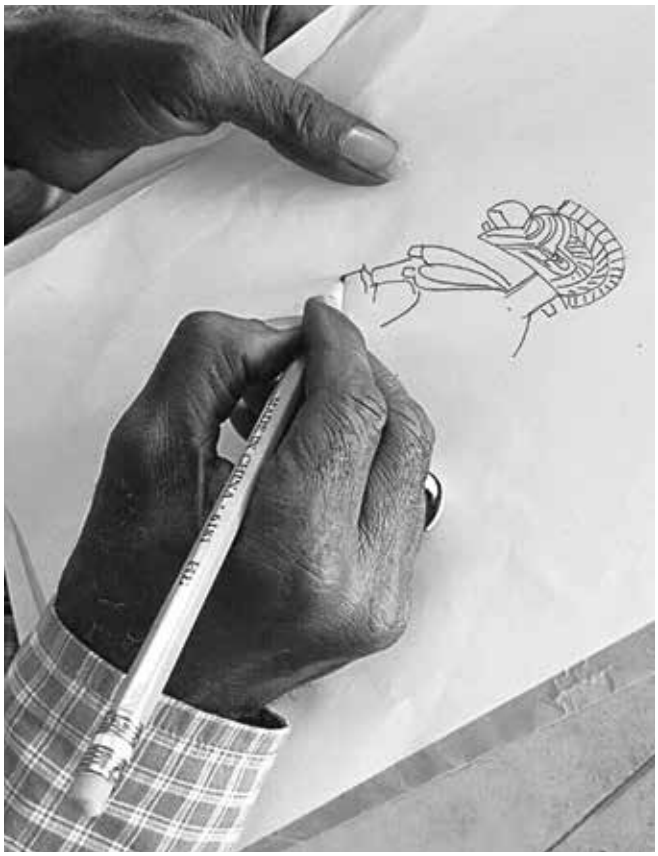
Once we were Baga now we are Susu

Sacred Art of the Guinean Coast
Dina and Michael Weiss
Collection of African Art



ONCE WE WERE **BAGA** NOW WE ARE SUSU

With the exhibitions of:

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Museum of Islamic and Near Eastern Cultures

MUZA, Eretz Israel Museum Tel Aviv

Tel Aviv Museum of Art

DINA & MICHAEL WEISS
COLLECTION OF
AFRICAN ART

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Sacred Art of the Guinean Coast
From the Dina and Michael Weiss
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מוזיאון ארץ־ישראל תל־אביב
MUZA ERETZ ISRAEL MUSEUM TEL-AVIV

מוזיאון התכשיטים ותולדות התרבות
Museum of Islamic and Near Eastern Cultures

Contents

Preface

I am writing this commendation of Michael's volume presenting his journey of the past fifteen years with a great sense of pride but also with apprehension.

On the one hand, I am proud that the beauty and stature of my forefathers' art will be shared with the world. Some of the works presented here were created by Baga masters who were my father's older "brothers" (a term we use to express respect and fidelity rather than direct family lines); these artists' guidance and daily presence is part of me. But their works were created for a completely different audience than the one meeting them today.
They were meant to serve their community, to act as a conduit between us and our ancestors, our history and, most importantly, between us as individuals and the guardian spirits. And as such, they protected and held our community intact and were responsible for its member's well-being.

The moment a work of art was delivered by the artist to the client who commissioned it, it was immediately disassociated from its worldly creator: it had evolved from an object to an entity.
The masters were known to all, regarded as pillars of their communities, respected and loved. Which, in a society with no materials assets, is everything.

Today this world is long gone. The proverbs and morals that once guided our everyday lives are forgotten. Their audience was dragged into a thinner and much poorer world of the present tense, here and now, expelled from the enchanted

woods, from the beauty of life in which the ancestors and forest spirits were always present.

I was born in 1950 in Kankan, Guinea.
My father El Hadj Sidime, a cabinetmaker, had a goldsmith's workshop; he gathered around him woodwork masters to answer the need of the communities around Kankan. My father became especially well-known after supplying the medallions decorating the Kankan bridge built by the French in 1951.

My most cherished memories are of sitting at his feet and sharpening his tools. My world changed when I was around 10. My father had died, the French had left, and commissions became scarce. I followed my elder brother's footsteps to the capital Conakry and there started to work in a studio responsible for supplying the regime with statues and gifts needed for political formalities.

There I met my Master and mentor Arman Bangoura, who introduced me to the beauty and wealth of Baga art. Those were the heydays of Sékou Touré's socialist revolution, we all felt that we were living in historical times – expeditions were arranged, scenery for productions of the revolutionary African Ballet were created, and we all were swept up in the zeal of establishing a new and just society.

I was sent to Sierra Leone and to Liberia to better understand and study the various societies; there I made friendships lasting until this very day.

When the regime changed with the ascent of Lansanna Conté to the presidency, I was chosen to represent Guinea in international exhibitions in Lagos, Hanover, Germany, and New York.

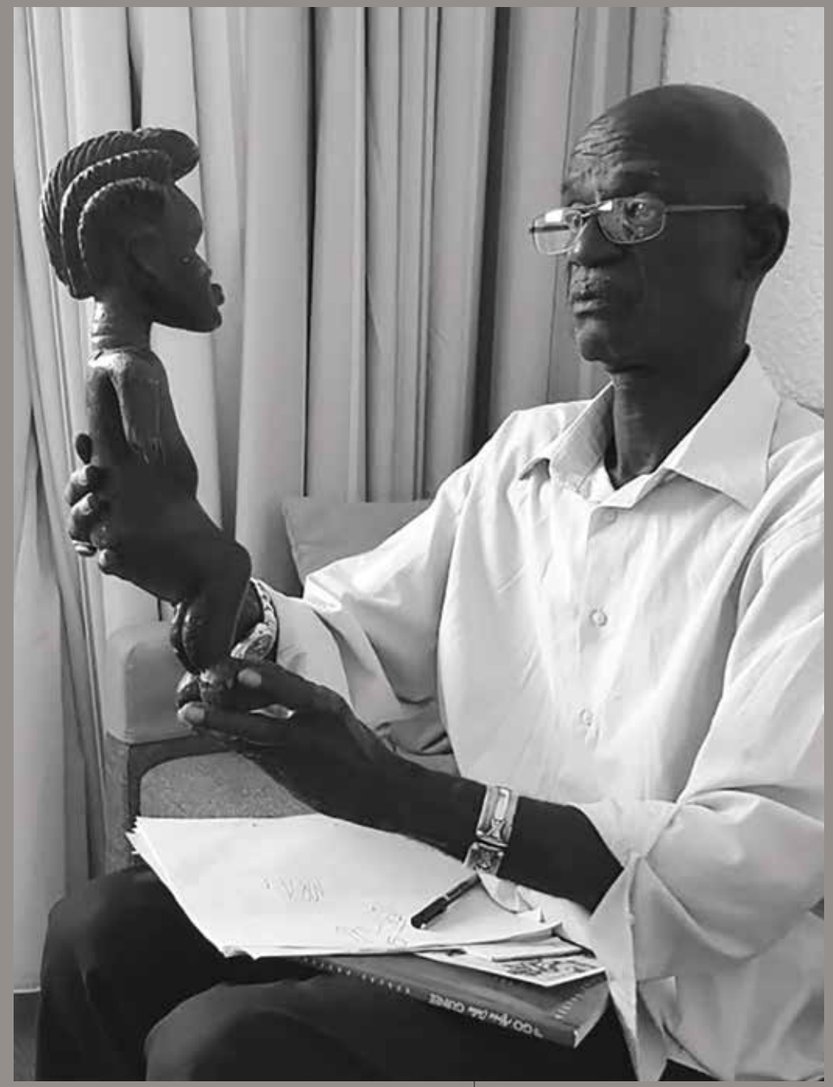
Being fluent in many carving styles, I produced a bust of Pope Jean Paul XII which was presented to him during his visit to Conakry in 1992.

Since then, producing Catholic liturgical scenes for the Guinea's Christian communities has been an area with which I have been continuously associated.

Over a decade ago, I was introduced to the architect Michael Weiss by Abou Kauroma, my finest protégé, and have guided Michael in his journey since then. Michael proved to be a quick learner, with an inquisitive eye accompanied by a craftsman's hand. Gradually, his sense of mission in gathering and documenting the last echoes of our ancestors' footprints evolved. I proudly joined his various endeavors, such as recording the Baga fables, which I joyfully illustrated, and documenting the histories of the Masters who stood behind our ancestors' images.

I hope that this volume will shed light on our heritage and will enable a wider audience to transcend cultural barriers and preserve the beauty, wisdom, morals, and faith embedded in each of them.

Nkai Sidime, Conakry



Master Nkai Sidime, Conakry, 2016.
Photo: M. Weiss.

Foreward

For centuries our ancestors' spirits hovered upon the face of our woods, and for their praise, our masters perfected their voice in gratitude for sharing the earth's wealth with us. Today the spirits as well as our masters are nearly gone.
I thank master Nkai Sidime and architect Michael Weiss for their courage and dedication in complying this volume, and thus enabling us to show our children, and share with the world our rich heritage.

Mr. Lonceny Camara
Guinea's former Minister of Culture,
Tourism and Crafts

This book is the fruit of intensive labour for which many of our Taigbe community have contributed.
I would like to thank them all. And especially Mr Abou Kouroma, for his untiring effort, enthusiasm and dedication, and of course Mr Michael Weiss for gathering, Documenting and safekeeping our heritage and producing this book as a testament to our culture.
We will make the N'demba dance in your honor.

Mr. Aboubacar Berto Bangoura
Taigbe Baga elder & sculptor

Foreward and Acknowledgments

The western visual vocabulary was shaped by works created early in the twentieth century by artists such as Picasso, Matisse, Giacometti to name a few, who were awakened when exposed to African Art brought to Paris from the French colonies.
Abstract, visceral, complex and most of all an epitome of human expression, acting as a conduit between us as humans and the universe.
Most of these works were created in societies which were devastated by the west. Displayed out of their context, exhibited either as curiosities or as artifacts from archaic cultures, analyzed and presented by strangers, advocating an imaginary cannon.

The Baga were a very small group, indigenous to one of the most inhospitable areas of the Guinean Coast. The impenetrable mangrove swamps acted for centuries as a safe haven for refugees from the transatlantic slave trade, enabling the "marginal" Baga to flourish and to create a unique formal visual vocabulary, culminating in the famous Nimba headdress. This culture came to an abrupt end as a result of the French orchestrated jihad of 1958, which was followed by fifty years of extreme Marxist regime, reclusion and dictatorship.

Upon witnessing the vastness and seclusion of the Guinean hinterlands, questions such as "what if and whether all has really been lost", compelled me for the past fifteen years to continue in this quest.
Unlike most Baga pieces displayed in the western hemisphere which were looted in 1958, the works presented here were entrusted to my care in full

transparency, with the blessing of their guardians and meeting all the obligations towards their community and the Guinean state. The political and artistic importance of these works cannot be overstated, they are the zenith of the Guinean coast paraphernalia, monumental in scale, created for public divination by esteemed Baga artists during the first half of the 20th century. Loved and cherished by their community, they were kept hidden deep in the enchanted forest, surviving colonial theft, Islam and Marxist persecution. Their presentation here as a cohesive group provide us with a rare glimpse to the depth and richness of west African traditional cultures.

Understanding the urgency in preserving this heritage, before lost in time, aided by the Baga community and local administration I have tried to gather all possible materials regarding the artists and the culture in which they operated, expanding the scope of the research to include the documentation the Baga elders' proverbs later to be illustrated by Master Sidime. In addition, this catalog tries to convey how these objects of art were elevated by their congregation to spiritual entities when seen late at night deep in the sacred forest, illuminated by fire, their heated metal studs decoration emitting lines of red light lingering in the darkness.

I hope that this volume as well as its related Museum exhibitions held in Jerusalem, Beer Sheba and Tel Aviv will trigger further study and enable the Baga Art to regain its prominence in world culture.

Many have helped and supported this quest,
but I would like to give special thanks to:

Master Nkai Sidime, My teacher;
Abou Kourouma, My righthand and ever-present partner;
His Excellency Kabine Komara, My friend and ally, the former prime minister of Guinea;
Dorit Shafir, The African and Oceania Curator, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem;
Dr. Sharon Laor-Sirak, The Curator of The Islamic and Near Eastern Cultures, Be'er Sheva;
Dr. Debby Hershman, The Deputy Director and Chief Curator-at-large, MUZA, the Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv;
Dorian Gottlieb, for his marvelous photos throughout the past ten years;
Joseph Jibri, for his patience and artistry in designing and the production of this volume.

My wife Dina and our children – Amnon, Johnatan, Naama, and Omri, who managed to sustain the branches from the Guinean enchanted forest tangling our home.

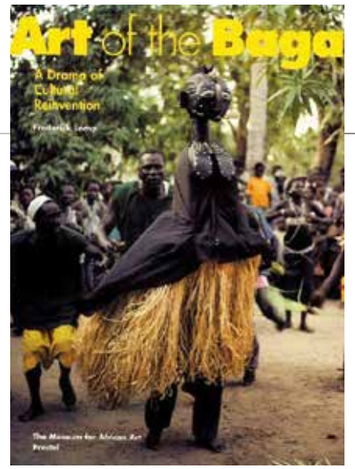
Michael Weiss

Art of the Enchantment,
July 2022–September 2022.
MUZA, Eretz Israel Museum
Tel Aviv. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

The exhibition of African masters at the MUZA museum in Tel Aviv is the culmination of a journey that began with my arrival in Conakry in early 2009. There I found a dilapidated city just awakening after fifty years of totalitarian regimes, one whose crumbling infrastructure bore witness to years of neglect and the devastating effects of Guinea's harsh subtropical climate.

The combination of Conakry's scarce land reserves and an absence of available modern office space appealed to my vision as a developer. Little did I know of the challenges of building in the sub-Sahara – the Ebola epidemic, military coups, complex codes of conduct, and a concept of time far different than my usual one. But the long process had its advantages. As an architect, an appreciation of art was in my DNA.

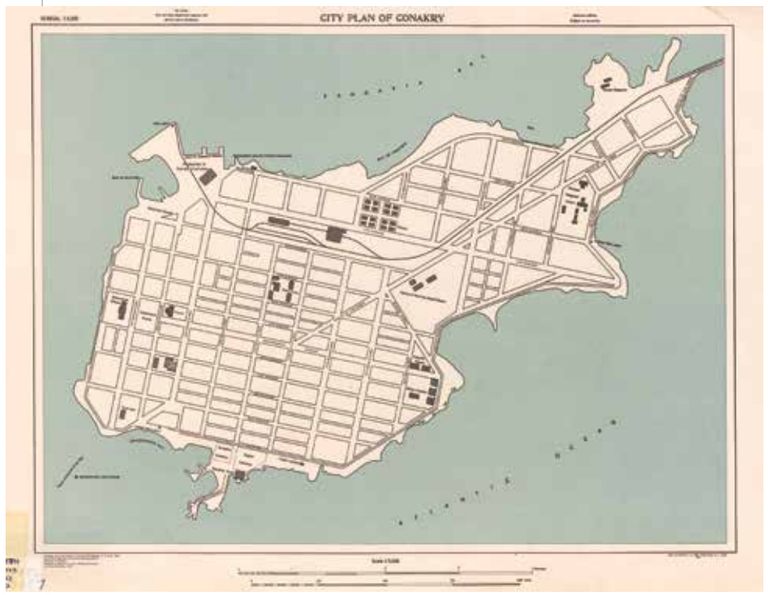
Zenith 1 Developtment
Conakry, Calum.
M. Weiss Architects.



Art of the Baga, Frederic Lamp, Prestel, The Museum for African Art, NY, 1996.

Master Nkai Sidime and the writer, Conakry, 2016. Photo: Abou Kouroma.

Conakry city map. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 1947



Serpent Dancer, concealed dress apparatus. Illustration: M. Weiss.

I was instantly captivated by my first glimpses of Baga art, still available at urban markets at the time. A decade ago, the sole reference book on the subject was Lamp's *Art of the Baga*, which I immediately devoured. Later, other scholars, such as Sarro, Berliner, and Curtis entered the field. But their works, elaborate and comprehensive as they were, did not answer seemingly mundane questions, such as how could a dancer wearing a two-meter-long snake headdress attached to his scalp perform without breaking his neck?
It took years, and many long-term relationships and friendships with Guinean collectors and scholars before I could fully recognize and appreciate the richness and sophistication of the Baga culture.

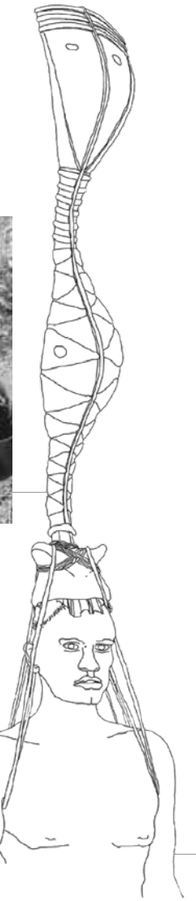


Illustration: M. Weiss

Masked serpent dancer, Boke, 1954. Museum du quai Barnsley, inv PP007124. Unknown photographer.

Serpent fixture Boke 2017. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Master Nkai Sidime, Conakry, 2015–2019. Photo: M. Weiss.

(pp. 22–23) Baga's distribution timeline along the Guinea coast According Comparative Linguistic Data. Eddie. L. Fields, 2004. Studio GAD.

The Baga

The Baga – in Susu, "inhabitants of the sea" or "those of the frontier land" – are a small, profoundly rural community whose population stood at 35,000 in the 1950s.

An indigenous coastal society, documented as living on the Guinean Atlantic coastline since the fifteenth century, the Baga were dispersed among some eighty villages set in subtropical mangrove swamps and brackish lagoons, which even today can only be accessed by boat. During the heavy rains, the Baga were virtually cut off from the mainland. The region's primal magic lies in its pristine beaches, oil palm immense silk cotton trees, and lush red and white mangroves.

Baga people distribution in Guinea. Studio GAD.

"River Nunez." Photo: Franz Bowald, 1927.


AFRICA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
GUINEA
BAGA
Rio
Componi
Dobali
NALU
Rio Nunez
LANDUMA
Kamsar
Tolkoc
Katako
Binari
Kufen
Rio Kapatchez
Nbotini
Bukor (Bigori)
INDIGENOUS CLUSTER
PRE 15TH CENTURY
BULONGIC
Moncong
Mambaco
Kifinda
Mintani
Kakté
SUSU
Rio Fatala
(Falatala)
Siboti
Douprou
Sobané
Bongolon
BOFFA
KAKISA
Rio Pongo
Marara
Rio
Konkouré
Taboria
Katema
Koba Raré
KOBA
Kaporo
KALUM
CONAKRY
BULLOM

Nimba headdress fixture.
Illustration: M. Weiss.

Nearly every village was home to three extended families, with public decisions made after lengthy discussions among the elders of each household. Life was organized according to a cross-section of age and work groups.
Rites of passage, circumcisions, and other religious ceremonies took place mainly late at night, conducted within the natural cathedrals of the ravines created by the gigantic roots of the sacred silk cotton trees.

"Dance of the Nimba," Moncton village, 1938. Photo: Beatrice Apia.

Social and public family events, such as weddings, funerals, and more, were lavishly celebrated and accompanied by dances, performances, and ample palm wine. Nearby villages joined in these activities, enabling the formation of larger political and social networks.

Up: Dance of Al-B'rak, Baga Sitemu, 1990. National Museum of African Art, Eliot Elifsofon Photographic archive
Photo: Frederic Lamp.
Down: Nimba headdress in between performances.
Unknown photographer.

Silk Tree, Matta, Guinea, 1904.
Photo: Rudolph Oldenburg.
Weltmuseum, Wien.

Elder divination in the sacred groove. Illustration: M. Weiss.

The Baga liturgy and paraphernalia united the entire congregation and granted it a cohesion and harmony in which each member was designated and committed to his or her age group, secret societies, and extended family.

A Safe Haven During the Global Slave Trade

Oryza Glaberria, rice indigenous to the Guinea Coast.

Throughout the centuries, the livelihood of the Baga people relied on tidal rice cultivation supported by fishing, hunting, and salt production (“We Baga Salt & RIce”). Over time, a comprehensive labor-intensive irrigation system based on tides and freshwater flow, which enabled the Baga to produce rice in commercial quantities, supplying friends and foes alike.

As working hands were in constant demand, the Baga were always ready to accept newcomers to their ranks. The endemic malaria as well as the virtual inaccessibility of the mangrove swamps created a marginally safe haven from Muslim cavalry always on the lookout for men to satisfy the endless demands of the global slave trade. The Baga territory up the Nunez River was thus declared an asylum, attracting refugees from the mainland.

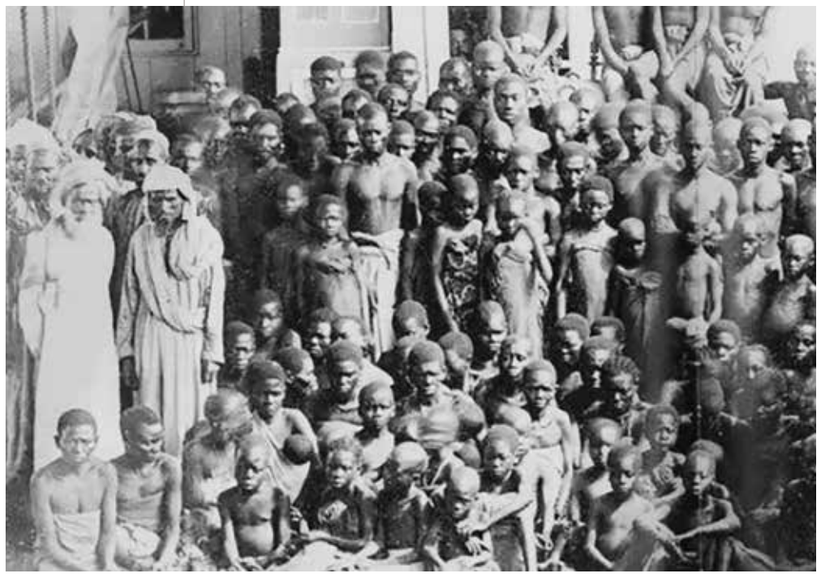
In two hundred years, human harvest for slavery reduced the sub-Saharan percentage of the world population from 18% to 6%. Late nineteenth century. Unknown photographer.

Fulbe warrior, Late nineteenth century. Universality of Dakar.

Seventeenth century Baga Rice farming. Log of the slaver Sandown 1793–1794. National Marintime Museum, London.

Men Prepare the Rice Fields. Photo: Olga F. Linares.

Guinean Coast, Arab Slave Vessel, late nineteenth century. Unknown photographer.

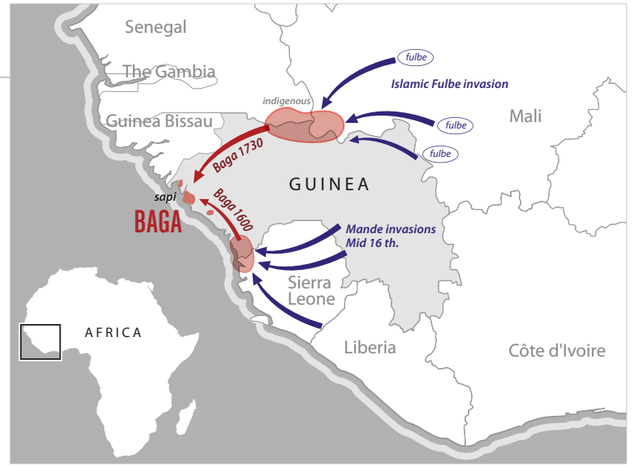


Culture and Art on the Last Frontier

Two major migration waves ultimately formed the Baga culture of the twentieth century.
In the sixteenth century, the Mande invasion of what is today Sierra Leone forced the indigenous high Sapi people to disperse. Those arriving on the Guinea coast brought with them the rich formal vocabulary they had cultivated, traces of which are quite evident in the Baga's present-day vocabulary. Other groups fleeing jihad and enslavement arrived from the Guinean highlands in the eighteenth century. These refugees from the mainland came from larger, less peripheral communities, and thus contributed to the formation of a complex liturgy.

Much of Baga culture, in which the consumption of palm wine, ceremonially served to elders by youth, plays a key role, has evolved from this people's standing conflict with and opposition to Islam.

Elaeis Guineese oil palm, the sap was extracted by a incision in the palm flower.



Migration to the safe heaven of the Mangrove community. Studio RenD.

Palm wine tapper, the sap ferments to a 4% alcoholic beverage, 1969. Photo: Chad Finer. Illustration: Louis van Houtte, Wikipedia

Palm wine consumption was intrinsic to Baga culture. Photo: BBC News.

Colonial Rule

The Baga did not put up much resistance to their French colonizers. Other than being expelled from Conakry, the capital, they continued to live their lives largely undisturbed. The creation of cantons governed by locals appointed by the colonial authority in the 1920s enabled the Baga to maintain their autonomy.
Under colonial rule, Katako was chosen as the capital of the Baga canton, and Mr. Baki Camara, and later, his descendants, were nominated as chiefs. In 1909, the first Catholic Missionary Church was established.

Inaugurating of the Nael Balley monument in Conakry.

The Camara family served the French authorities well, especially in the mid-1940s, when it harvested vast quantities of rice for the Vichy regime. "Being pagan was hard work for the youth."

Baga Art and the West

Pablo Picasso, Marie-Thérèse Walter, 1932, Musée National Picasso, Paris.

Pablo Picasso, Head, Estate of the artist.

Although Western culture arrived on the shores of West Africa in the 1930s, it did not enrich the rural mangrove community. Instead, the Baga art exported to Paris ended up influencing Western culture.
Almost all the avant-garde artists of the early twentieth century collected and were influenced by African art. The oversized Baga sculptures, with their unique colors and rich morphology, had a particular appeal for them.
These artists, especially those of the Dada movement, turned their backs on the Western cultural establishment. They saw African works of art as an alternative and new spiritual forebear, a primary and purer ancestor with whom they could identify. They divorced themselves completely from Western culture – a culture that ultimately led to the atrocities of World War I.
In 1928, Picasso bought a Baga Nimba mask that had a great impact on his search for a new visual language for the twentieth century.

"I experienced my greatest artistic emotions when the sublime beauty of the sculptures executed by the anonymous artists of Africa suddenly became apparent to me.
These religious, passionate, and rigorously logical works are the most powerful and beautiful things the human imagination has produced." (Pablo Picasso)

Without their creators' knowledge, the works of the "deep rural" Baga, created far from Paris, became "objects of great desire" for French high society.

Pablo Picasso and 'Marie Therese Walter', 1931. Photo: Brassai (?).

The great Colonial Exhibition, Paris 1931. Entrance ticket, sold to a record of nine million visitors.

Picasso's Nimba, acquired by the artist in 1926. Museo Picasso Málaga. Photo: Roberto Oterio

Their display alongside modern art was perceived as a mark of good taste, cosmopolitanism, and sophistication.
The great colonial exhibition of 1931, which attracted over nine million visitors, disseminated and reinforced the connection between modernity and African art, in general, and Baga art, in particular.

Revolution

World War II, the complete collapse of the old order, followed by the abolition of the canton system, and the Brazzaville Conference of 1946, led to the end of colonial rule over the Baga, and with it, the gerontocracy of the earlier dynasties. Marxist ideology and pan-African Islam appealed to the younger societies. The generational tension inherent in Baga culture erupted into open rebellion against tradition, which was identified with reactionary pro-colonialism. All this culminated in a jihad against the Baga elders in the late 1950s.

"Uprising," Kanavalov Serge, charcoal 75x58 cm, circa 1965, Soviet propaganda study, the Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art.

Chairman Mao Zedong with Sékou Touré, 1960. The Wilson Center Archive. Unknown photographer.

Iconoclasm

One of the reasons why Baga economy could not grow to meet changing times lay in the chronic lack of land. In addition to the tropical region's extreme weather conditions, each village was surrounded by a belt of sacred forest composed of gigantic cotton silk trees and natural flora, a belt deemed off limits to everyone but the initiated elders. Thus, any development would entail the desecration of the forest.

First Baga iconoclasm 1956–1957. Asekou Sayon posing in front of Baga loot. Photo: Nicaud 1957.

Hellen Leloup Kramer, Hoarding Baga sacred paraphernalia looted during the 1957 jihad. Courtesy Leloup Gallery Paris. Photo: Nicaud 1957.

In February 1957, the Marabou Alseco Sayo was invited by the Baga youth organization to undertake a jihad and eliminate the old regime and its ways. Sayo stayed in Katako for four months, felling the great cotton silk trees, laying the sacred forest bare. His mob forced the elders to relinquish their masks, symbols of power and tools of sorcery. Sayo burned some of the art, but aware of its commercial value, sold most of the looted objects to French representatives and Parisian gallery owners, such Hellen Leloupe, who accompanied his mob.

Cultural Revolution and Demystification

President Sékou Touré admiring a Nimba headdress at the Museum of Primitive Arts, 1959. Unknown photographer.

Guinea's independence in 1958 as well as the Marxist regime of Sekou Toure marked the beginning of the end of Baga's religious art. In 1961, all of Guinea's forest tribes were declared the enemy from within; their cults were restricted and a demystification program was initiated. Theatrical troupes passed through the villages and presented the elders' tradition and beliefs as degenerate and regressive. The cult and its production of religious paraphernalia were practically banned.
In 1968, a violent campaign – coinciding with the Chinese Cultural Revolution – was declared. The elders of the community were beaten, the old cult and its masks were deemed unlawful, and its operators were taken, stripped naked, and exposed as charlatans. The remaining Baga liturgical paraphernalia was confiscated. Some was taken and exhibited at state "museums," but most was burned. Since Baga sculptures were viewed in the West as the spiritual forebears of twentieth century art, every collector and museum tried to display them as "the source"; hence, the Baga Nimba was set on a pedestal looking down at its surroundings as a proud foremother. In Guinea, however, such statues virtually disappeared.

Public hanging in Conakry, 1971. Photo: Unknown Photographer.

Execution in Camp Berio. Concentration camp built by Czechoslovakia in Conakry In which 50,000 inmates perished during the seventies. Unknown photographer.

Lions without Order & Law Won't Get Very Far

When a lion decides
To fix the roof
He needs all his friends
To see the task through.

They'll make up a plan
To use straw and hay
To work as a team
And finish that day.

But if they all gather
With no clear intent
They'll scatter all over
And the roof will stay bent.

Any group with a task
Needs order and law
To get the ball rolling
And finish the job.

The Goat Needs the Wall to Win the War

When two goats go out to fight
Who will win
The battle of might?
She who used the walls to stand strong:
Those who use their support
Get furthest along.

The Katako Hoard

Master N. Sidime, delivering a commission, Conakry, 1980s. Unknown photographer.

In mid–2017, Nkai Sadiki, a master sculptor, scholar, and long-time friend and teacher, informed me that he had been approached by representatives of the Katako's Baga elders who wished to part with a cache of pre-iconoclasm sacred statues that had been stored in total secrecy. Nkai, a master craftsman who regularly supplied the Baga women's association with modern paraphernalia needed for their gatherings, had known of the statues' survival and assisted in the day-to-day maintenance of its wood, but had been obliged by the societies' rules to keep their existence a secret.

The Katako Catholic Mission, les Pres du Saint-Esprit, Paris, 1930. Unknown photographer.

Thereupon, a hastily organized team embarked on a trip to Katako, which in colonial times, had

Katako sacred wood. The hoard resurfacing after 60 years of hideout, 2019. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Katako sacred forest, 2019. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

served as the Baga's regional administrative capital. Today it is a small, dormant village with a mere few hundred residents nestled deep among the mangrove swamps of the Nunez River. It took a laborious year before all the parties involved – the spirits, community members, women and men's associations, were satisfied. The hoard, hidden from sight since the Muslim jihad of 1957, was finally ready to emerge from its underground hideout, deep in the women's sacred grove and sheltered by a canopy of cotton silk trees, where it had found refuge for over sixty years.

A Time Capsule

A statue from the Katako hoard. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

The hoard consists of ten sculptures, all are intricately detailed, displaying gestures and finery of a culture long gone.
The pieces, each weighing 20–30 kg, are sculpted from extremely hard and heavy teak wood. All the sculptures have been dated with the help of Infrared Spectroscopy technique to between 1890 and 1950.

The question of whether all the sacred paraphernalia of the Baga people was truly destroyed has never been answered. Rumor had it that some had been saved and lay hidden. Western

Katako sacred wood, the hoard resurfacing from 60 years in hiding. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Chairman Mao Zedung with Sekou Toure, 1960. The Wilson Center Digital Archive. Unknown photographer.

'Cultural Revolution, 1965–1984'. Ruth Philips, 1970s.

Baga elders, Katako 2019. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

scholars working in the area in the 1990s related stories and rumors about still hidden statues, but none have ever surfaced.
Sékou Touré Marxist regime labeled all "Forestiers," including the Baga, as an enemy from within and conducted a violent and structured twenty-year-long campaign against any manifestation of pagan beliefs. All religious or semi-religious societies still existing at the time were strictly banned.

As early as 1957, the Katako Baga elders knew of the advancing jihad and the devastation of other

Maurice Nicoud whose role in orchestrating the Baga's 1958 Jihad and art pillage is still a mystery, Conakry, 1954. Unknown photographer.

Katako sacred wood. The hoard resurfacing from 60 years in hiding. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Baga communities where Islamic preachers had already arrived. The elders sent delegates to the French authorities begging them to prevent Sayo's entry into the village, but the delegation failed. Whether Maurice Nicoud, who was collaborating with the jihadists and instrumental in their quest, was, in fact, a government official could not be verified. Knowing that the church grounds were deemed off limits to the jihad and its mob, the Baga elders entrusted their most sacred objects for safe-keeping to the hands of local missionaries serving at Katako's church.
The abolition of the chiefdoms in late 1957, followed by Guinea's independence in 1958, changed the world from which the statues were seeking refuge. Hidden during the twilight of colonial rule, they were returned to their owners at the height of Guinea's cultural revolution.

The French administration left the country in total disarray, destroying whatever meager infrastructure it had created during its fifty-year reign.

As the Katako Catholic missionaries were regarded as colonial representatives, and were ordered to close down their schools. By 1967, they had all left Guinea. That same year, the government directed a violent "cultural revolution" in emulation of the Maoist one in China. As a result, the hoard was immediately buried deep in the off-limits, sacred wood from which it has now emerged.

Katako sacred wood. The hoard resurfacing after 60 years in hiding. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Conakry's National Museum, Director's stamp.

In the late 1980s, Katako's Baga slowly began resuming their practices, although secrecy remained part of their culture.

Most of the artifacts in the hoard were created for the ceremonies of the women's association, an organization that managed to hold its rank and power even during Sékou Touré's darkest hours. Unlike other cultural groups in the Guinean rainforest who were able to send their youth to initiation camps in Liberia and thus maintain their traditions, the Baga people were completely surrounded by the Susu Muslim population. Thus, Baga power slowly diminished, as summed up by their saying: **Once we were Baga, now we are Susu**.

The last Baga initiation camp was held in the early 1950s. Dances and rituals are still maintained in the village, where they are perceived as a tradition and symbol of Baga's unity, but communal practices in the sacred woods ended long ago. The congregation has aged, while youth is seeking its future elsewhere.

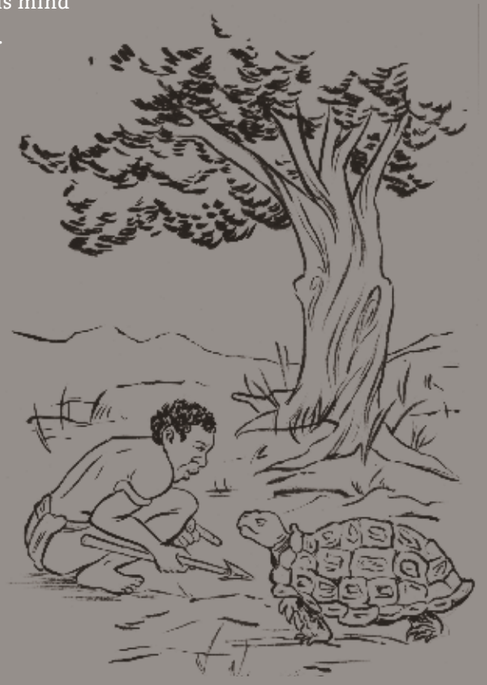
The Nimba, once the hallmark of the Baga, was appropriated to serve as Guinea's national symbol. Those of the Baga elders who were left therefore decided that the old spirits would perform one final act of generosity towards to their community. Then they would be set free on a journey to seek audiences elsewhere.

Even the Turtle Has a Weak Point

The turtle's body is very strong:
It's covered in armor as he walks along
And if the hunter wants to attack
He must ignore the turtle's back;

And shoot his arrow straight to the mouth!
For even the strongest, without a doubt,
Have spots on their bodies where armor is thin;
Where arrows and armies can come and break in.

Man, like the turtle, must be on defense
In every moment, take care of the fence
Around his body, his heart, and his mind
And be wary of who he lets inside.



The Goat and the Hyena

If a goat and hyena are trapped in a cell
And things between them are not going well
They'll fight! The hyena is canny and yells:
"He bit me!
He hurt me!
My throat, how it swells!"

See how the strong pretends to be weak:
The smart one fools them all with his speech.
When man is in need, he'll act like this, too–
He'll shriek what he must, no matter what's true.

Henriette Conté's Estate

Lancana & Henriette Conte, Conakry, 1975.
Photo: Guineeinfomode.

In May 2019, Guinea's former First Lady of twenty-four years (1984–2008) Henriette Conté, passed away.

Henriette had been Lancana Conté's first love; the image of them waltzing together while Lancana was a young captain serving at the Guinean border still resonates today.
Although President Conté had three other wives, Henriette, who was known for her honesty, compassion, and integrity, remained at his side and continued to serve as Guinea's first lady throughout Lancana's twenty-four years in office.

During this time, she was often called to mediate between her husband and her fellow Guineans, employing her skills to ease tensions between Guinea's unions and her husband's military regime.

Henriette Conté and head of the opposition Cellou Dialo, 2015.
Photo: Guineeinfomode.

Henriette Conte's funeral attended by Guinean president Alpha Conde, 2020. Star TV.

Henriette Conté was Guinea's moral beacon; as such, her death was grieved by all within the Guinean political sphere. Guinean President Alfa Condé attended the state funeral held in her honor, as did Cellou Diallo, head of the Guinean opposition. Lengthy obituaries were published in all the Guinean media.

Henriette Conté, Conakry, 1985. Guineematin. Unknown photographer.

Being a Baga from Boké, born to the Bangoura of Taigbe, Katako, she advocated for the Baga's agenda in Conté's centralist regime in Conakry.

Traces of the Guinean government's close connections to the Baga community can be seen in the assortment of figures riding atop the Sibindel headrests from the 1960s and 1970s, which were used by dancers during receptions honoring government dignitaries visiting the Bagaland.

Headdress, (sibondel) 117x63x59 cm. Second half of twentieth century, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B14,1948. Gift of the Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art.
Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

Henriette, like most of her female rural compatriots, was initiated into the Baga women's secret societies.
The various women's associations of Guinea were the only traditional civil groups to survive Sekou Touré's twenty-five years of Marxist dictatorship.

During this time, the Baga village skyline, which had been dominated for centuries by the silhouettes of the sacred cotton trees, gradually gave way to one of mosques and minarets.

These were years in which the male Baga population converted en masse to Islam, the old forest spirits and their advocates became branded as colonial collaborators, and foreign agents and village elders who adhered to the "ancient regime" were arrested and their sacred groves uprooted.

Unlike their male counterparts, the women's secret associations challenged the revolutionary zeal of the central government. Advocating and maintaining their responsibilities for their community, they managed to retain their power, traditions, and morals. The women's sacred groves and their domain thus remained virtually untouched.

Katako women's sacred forest, 2020. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Women's association demonstration, Conakry, 1970. Unknown photographer.

Restoration work carried by Master Curia, Conakry, 2020. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Throughout her long career, Henriette was approached by delegations and representatives of the Baga women's association who pressed their cases while bearing gifts, as was customary at such meetings. Due to her position as a Baga elder, Henriette was entrusted with major artifacts from the Baga women's sacred paraphernalia.

Upon her death, elaborate farewell celebrations were held due to her status. Traditionally, the cost of such week-long receptions was covered primarily by the sale of religious paraphernalia held by the deceased. The elder was merely the custodian of the objects entrusted by the community to his/her care, and thus, upon his/her death the objects were regarded as communal property. As was customary, I was approached by the Baga elders to mediate the funeral costs and the receptions held in Henriette's honor.

The work restored. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

Slowly, a group of twelve pieces were uncovered, ten of which were masterpieces of the early twentieth century that had been hidden from sight since the iconoclasm of 1957. The final two were later versions of these from the eighties.

As some of the statues were in a progressive state of decay, a major painstaking restoration project led by master Nkai Sidime and Master Morri Curia, a renown Guinean restoration expert, was undertaken.

Henriette Conté's collection, supplemented by the Katako hoard, that was exhibited at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem's 'Nimba: The Great Mother and

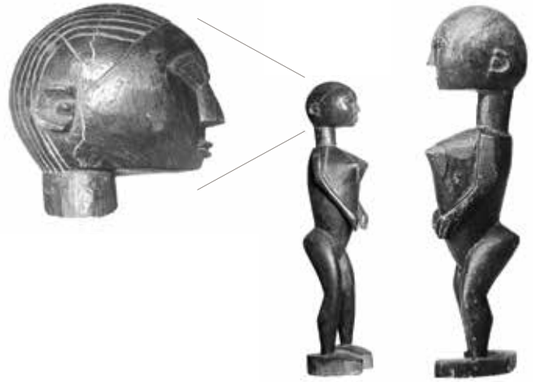
Kabine Komara, Guinea's former prime minister and Dorit Shafir, African and Oceania curator at The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 2018. Photo: M. Weiss.

Baga Art' exhibition, consists of most of the known oeuvre used by the Baga's women's association in the early twentieth century. It is a cohesive group that represents Baga culture at its zenith.

Exhibition detail, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
Photo: Eli Posner.

Baga elders interviewed, Binari village, Boke, 2021.
Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Close examination reveals three distinctive artists within the group, each with his own unmistakable approach, manner, and realm of interests. All operated within the liturgy and canon of Baga paraphernalia, but each employed his own unique and personal artistic vocabulary. The first embarked on a formalist journey toward the abstract.
The second aimed at the metaphysical and the spiritual. Finally, the third indulged in his love of the figurative and delight in detail while moving toward realism and portraiture.



Left: Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.
Right: Yale University, Art Gallery, Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Osborn to the Linton Collection, no. 1954.38.31

The still living Baga elders were approached with questions regarding the artists, their whereabouts, biographies, and other details. Contrary to former Western beliefs, all three artists were known figures, and respected members of their communities. Some were descendants of a long line of masters, whose craftsmanship had been loved, known, and appreciated for years.
Further research facilitated by the Boké governor revealed their years of birth, and more.

Janus Head, Collection National Museum, Van Wereldculturen. Coll. no. AM-43-34.

The three masters are:

Amadi Famori Camara, born in 1885 in Faraba
Barbady Foté Camara, born in 1890 in Taigbe
Ali Manigué Bangoura, born in 1895 in Camala

A comparative study of collections in other Western museums enabled additional attributions to the oeuvre of these three masters. For example, Famori Camara's distinctive abstract vocabulary enabled the attribution of the following works:

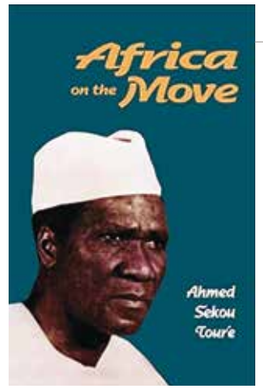
Standing Male and Female Figures, Yale University Art Gallery, acquired 1954.
Nimba Headdress, Rierberg Museum, Zurich.
Janus Head, National Museum van Wereldculturen.

The Baga Artists

Until the 1950s, all youth were sent to the "bush school," attendance at which was a prerequisite for attaining adult status. Male youth spent up to three years secluded in the bush, instructed by the elders on all the skills – social and professional – deemed necessary for leading an adult life. Upon returning to the village, they were expected to fulfill the traditional role established by their peers.

Boys bush school, 1970. Indiana University Image Collection. Photo: W. Siegmann.

The bush school for girlslasted much less time than that of the boys and was held on the premises of the women's society, an off-boundary secluded hut located at the village's eastern perimeter. The girls spent several months in seclusion mastering their expected role as wives and mothers, and, most importantly, cultivating interdependence, secrecy, and loyalty to their fellow women. In this way, they came to serve as the backbone of Baga rural society as a unified, coherent labor force and a political group, responsible for the village commerce and social well-being.



Africa on the move, Sékou Touré, 1978 book. Reprinted by Panaf, 2010.

The various women's secret societies maintained their power and secrecy throughout the twentieth century, withstanding the onslaught of Sékou Touré's Marxist regime. They ceased to operate only at the dawn of the twenty-first century, when the collapse of subsistence farming and the rise of mass Chinese rice imports opened Guinea to global international trade.

Right: Girls' bush school, 1907. Photo: Thomas Aldridge.

Transplanting rice seedlings, 2002. Photo: Olga F. Linares.

Rice Imports to Guinea. Photo: David Makee.

As in most acephalic West African societies, the Baga's position in life was predetermined by birthright – offspring of first wife, second wife, etc. – as well as by the prominence of ancestors or family line. This highly deterministic social structure was balanced by a parallel structure based on age, membership in secret societies, and specific tutelage. Such an elaborate double structure enabled each member to find their voice while maintaining the equilibrium on which communal Baga society depended.

Timba rain drum, Katako, Guinea, 1930. Les Pères du Saint-Esprit. Unknown Photographer.

The Baga was a society with no concept of personal material accumulation; wealth and status were measured in people (dependents) needed for political influence.
The society was a verbal one, in which language and conversation were held in high regard. Thoughts and ideas were implied rather than stated directly. Proverbs and elaborate stories were used to make a point. Decisions were reached by elders following lengthy meetings at which all adult members were expected to express their views, each in accordance with his position and rank.

Bush school graduation ceremonies, Kalaktshe, Guinea, 1942. Institute de l'Afrique Noire Dakar. Photo: G. Labitte

For a verbal, non-materialistic society such as this, the need for a written text was less acute. This was a society in which ancestors were present, involved in everyday life, and treated with great respect, while living people were merely transient. Bagas venerated the all-encompassing forest, nature, and forces of sub-Saharan equatorial Africa.

Baga elder with a rain drum, 2020. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

The only physical manifestations of culture, knowledge, and memory were the three-dimensional objects produced by members of the society with the skills taught primarily at the bush school: wood carvings in the case of boys, and pottery in that of girls. Further study under a known master was pursued only by those so inclined. Nearly all material objects used in life were produced by members of the group. Imported objects brought from afar, exchanged at crossroads markets set up by traveling Mandingo merchants, were of a mundane nature: jewelry, garments, medicines, or functional novelties. Everyday utilitarian objects and the customary religious paraphernalia, in contrast, were created by the Baga themselves with skills taught in the bush school.

Master Nkai Sidime in the 1970s. Unknown Photographer.

For the Baga, life and art were totally interwoven. Religious objects accompanied all aspects of life and the celebrations conducted at everyday village gatherings: the setting of the bush school, graduation ceremonies, personal and extended family milestones, weddings and funerals, secret society gatherings, and religious conclaves deep in the woods.

To meet this demand, members produced an abundance of objects adhering to the conventional canon. Religious paraphernalia intended for the village masquerades were usually commissioned from local artisans, while important secret society commissions, such as power objects that proclaimed their members' stature or the society's power,

Baga statues by Master Manique Bangura, mid-1930s, Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

and were needed to impress new recruits, were commissioned from known masters whose fame as artists extended beyond their village.
At the heights of their powers, some of these artists even managed to replace farming altogether with full-time carving. Only a few, however, elevated their practice to high art, and aspired to reach the profound while maintaining a dialogue with tradition and the canon.

The artists were known figures, recognized and appreciated by their peers. Like all artists, they were conscious of their vocation and not devoid of ego. As such, they were eager to leave their personal mark on posterity. Apart from their distinctive style and manner, they, being illiterate, developed a characteristic mark in order to express their authorship, usually a rendering of an ear or eye. They were also conscious of the fact that once their art was accepted, ordained by the clergy, and consecrated for ritual usage, it would attain divine status. At that point, it would be disassociated from its worldly creators. In the Guinean hinterlands, for example, women's associations such as the Sande – Sowei masks, were known to appear deep in the woods near a source of running water and to proclaim their presence to the association members in dreams without naming their male makers.

The desire to create a work that could achieve divine status ruled out the creation of representational portraits; desirable instead were emblematic portraits that relied on symbolic,

Master Arman Bangura at work. Conakry, 1990. Photo: Unknown Photographer.

evocative imagery, although a generalized anthropomorphic approach was the norm.

One can only marvel at the eidetic capabilities demonstrated by these masters, who created highly complex compositions, knowing, as they did, the importance and religious status of their art within their community, and the amount of love, respect, and care that would be bestowed on their works once completed.

Emblematic Baga portraiture, now (2017), and then (1930s). Statue photos: Dorian Gottlieb. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

These masters were able to transform a mentally constructed image into a block of wood, and to carve the final image without any preparatory stages. (Sketches or paper have never been part of traditional West African art.)

Usually the artist chose and felled a tree only after deciding what he needed. The actual image materialized during the carving process.
When commissioning a work from these masters and determining reimbursement, members of the society usually took into account expected delays as well as the time that the artist needed to contemplate and find his vision before producing the piece.

An artist at work, carving by gripping the adze in one hand while the other stabilizes a freshly hewed trunk, 1950s. Photo: Hans Himmelheber.

A variety of sub-Saharan adzes were used to carve these monumental works of art.
Sitting or crouching on the ground, the artist carved with one hand, while using the other as well as his lap, thighs, and knees to hold the object in place. The production of such elaborate, precisely crafted sculptures with a simple adze required great concentration and technical skill. Despite the Baga's long history of trade with the West, they never resorted to industrial tools. (Manipulating Western carving tools requires two hands.)

The artists worked within their tradition, in close geographical proximity to each other, and aware of each other's accomplishments. All enjoyed the full artistic license granted them by their community, and their visual language developed from their memory of their own masters' works.
Once a piece was delivered to the patron (women's association, etc.), the artist never saw it again. A male could never venture into the women's sacred grove where these idols resided. The Western concept of a studio of a space containing multiple works in various stages of completion and enables

Master Famori Camara.
Photo: Unknown Photographer.

contemplation was totally alien to these artists. Each new commission had to be drawn from memory and created from scratch. Each work was unique. The artists respected the artistic heritage of their ancestors and considered it sacred.

The bodies of work produced by these artists were organically bound to their community and faithful to their tradition, yet never marred by atavistic rigidity or soulless formalism. Their creations, in fact, are wonderful examples of artistic license and tradition working in tandem to portray the divine.

Master Curia during restoration using an adze. Conakry, 2020. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Adze, Eliot Elisofon photographic archive, OMNIA.

It is a great privilege to make this small gesture and replace the customary museum plaques attributing these African masterpieces to anonymous artists with those bearing their actual names. Each of these artists worked in his community, within the canonical guidelines of his cult, and was attuned to the spirit of his time; each possessed his own artistic manner and a fully developed, personal voice.

When the Pelican's Full, He Won't Harm

Sometimes the pelican allows the fish
To swim by in peace, to do as they wish.
What is it that makes the pelican so calm?
If he's no longer hungry, the fish swim along!

Follow the Elephant

The elephant easily
walks through the trees
for her trunk clears the way
and makes walking a breeze!

If you follow the elephant,
your path will be clear
of brushes and branches
and you'll walk without fear.

When following along
someone else's path
make use of their labor
to simplify your task.

MASTER AMADI FAMORI CAMARA

Master Amadi Famori Camara

Amadi Famori Camara was born in Faraba Guinea in 1890. Four statues with outstanding abstract characteristics, once part of the Katako hoard, were later joined by two additional exceptional pieces from Henriette Conté's estate. Close examination reveals that all six display characteristics of a unique master hand, a mature artist with a personal vocabulary who commanded a technique to match. Five have been dated with infrared spectrography to circa 1930–1950, while an older small Nimba of extremely condensed wood has been dated to 1880.

Works by master Famori Camara the Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

All are carved out of dense and heavy African teak, all measuring nearly the same height range of 80–90 cm. They were immediately recognized by the Baga elders and by Master Bangoura as works of the Master Famori Camara, a renowned Baga sculptor who was part of the creative hub in Faraba prior to Guinean independence. Master Bangoura proudly aligned himself and his work with that of Camara, and even claimed to be one of his descendants.

Famori Camara the Elder's Nimba emerging from its hideout in the Katako sacred forest. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

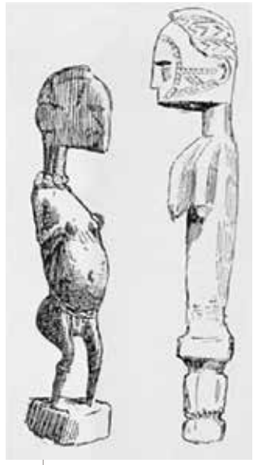


Illustration of Baga art published in 1886, Ross Archive, Yale.

An analysis of Camara's work clearly reveals his language. He possessed the ability to reinterpret and modernize the traditional Baga canon, while using semi-abstract shapes and myriad geometric patterns.

Camara developed a language in which the traditional ornate vocabulary was gradually reduced to a collage of primary shapes. He constructed the orthodox Nimba's "Fulani" facial ornament from straight and rigorous geometric lines. Camara also reduced the ear to a circle surrounded by a concave half moon. the Baga elders described this feature as "Famori's personal mark," an observation further supported by a comparison of it to the ears of works similar to Camara's that are currently in Western museums, such as those in the Rietberg Museum, the Yale African Art Gallery, and the museum of Berg en dal Netherlands – all works that might therefore be claimed as belonging to Famori Camara's oeuvre.

The wonderful small nineteenth-century Nimba, whose right face has been leveled by countless loving strokes of hands during its long years of service, is attributed to Camara's father (an artist considered by everyone as a forebear of the Katako sculptors) and has a slightly different ear mark. A drawing of additional works resembling those made by this hand was published in 1886 by G. Caspar Felix in his account of his trip down the River Nunez, a trip embarked upon again only half a century later by Fred Bowald.

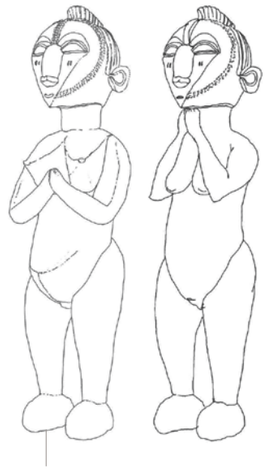
Lorenzo Costa, Saint Margaret praying, 1550, Musée Malraux.

Camara's 1930s standing Nimba in a "Christian" posture, the Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

Cola nuts used as an offering.

Master Famori Camara worked in the 1930s and 1940s, a time when the colonial regime and its representatives in Katako, the French Catholic missionaries, were at the zenith of their power and Christianity was slowly being integrated into Baga life. A glimpse of how Camara's art could have evolved had the jihad and the subsequent destruction of Baga culture not occurred can be gleaned by comparing this singular interpretation of a standing Nimba, her hands clasped in a classic Christian gesture of prayer, with eyes turned upwards and her lips smiling, to the traditional Nimba, whose hands are clasped beneath her chin

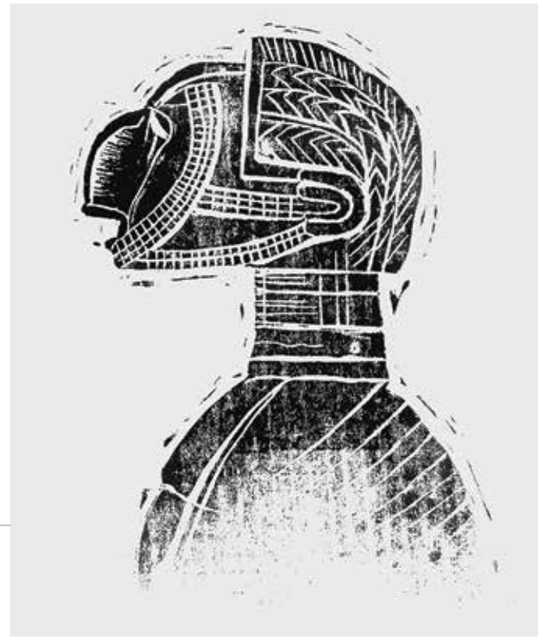
Katako 2017, farewell ceremonies. Photo: Abou Kourouma.



Camara's standing Nimba, hands clasped in prayer, smiling mouth, diagonal abdomen. Classical standing Nimba, hands clasped beneath the chin, closed mouth, rounded belly. Illustration: M. Weiss.

in a vow of silence, her eyes downcast, and her mouth closed to signify secrecy. One is a figure denoting power to whom worship is due, while the other is a mediator between God and her community.

Camara's work clearly shows that he was preoccupied with formalist and conceptual problems similar in nature to those of fellow Western European modern artists.
His oeuvre challenges the last century's boundaries between and definitions of traditional versus modern art, White and Black, Western and African.



Famori Camara the Elder, Nimba, linoleum print. Studio Gad.

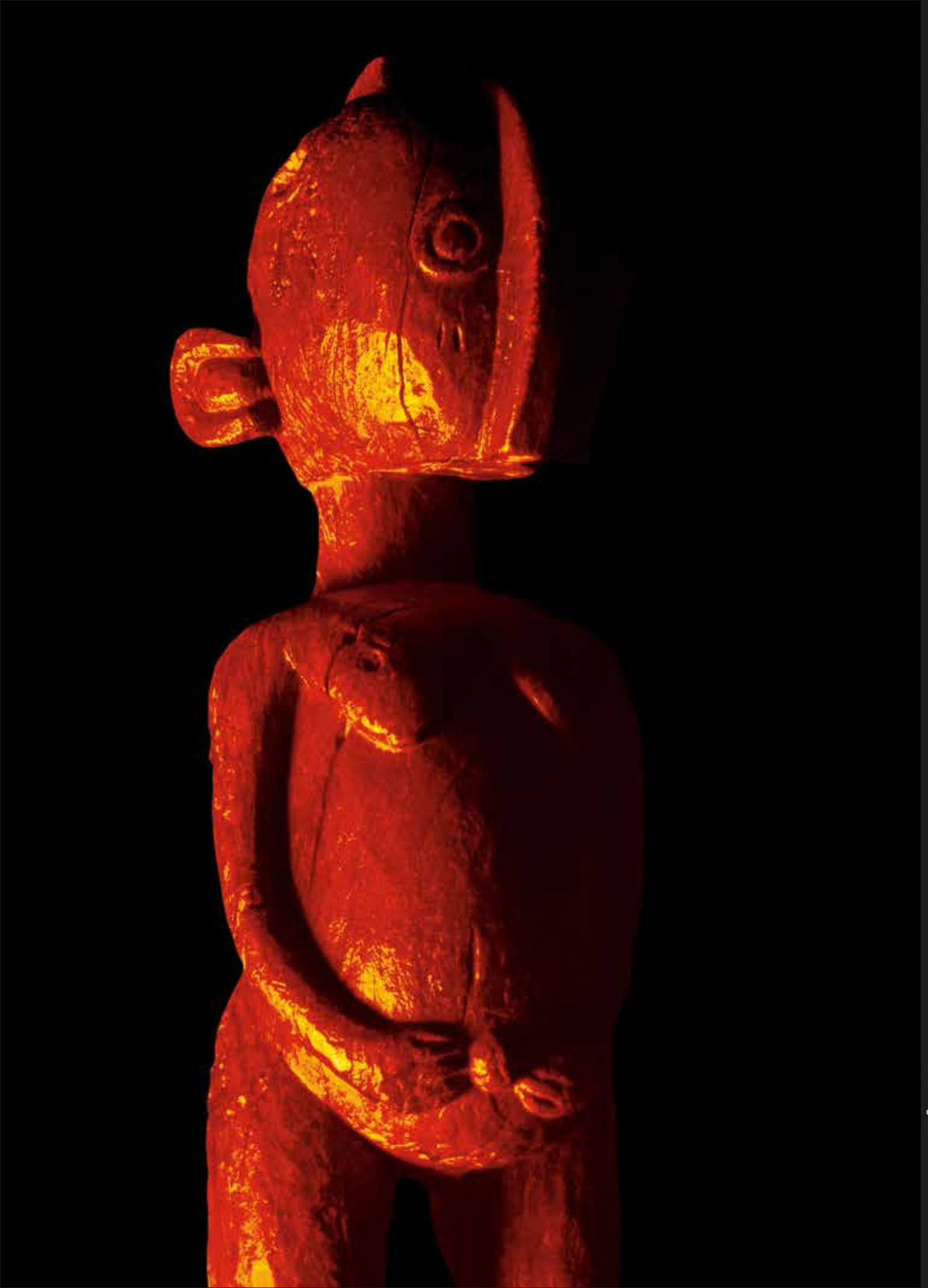
1

Power figure

Amadi Famori Camara
Symbolic figure of girl prior to initiation

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1935
Teak
85x24x37

Her belly and navel hint at pregnancy.



Power Figure

2

Power figure

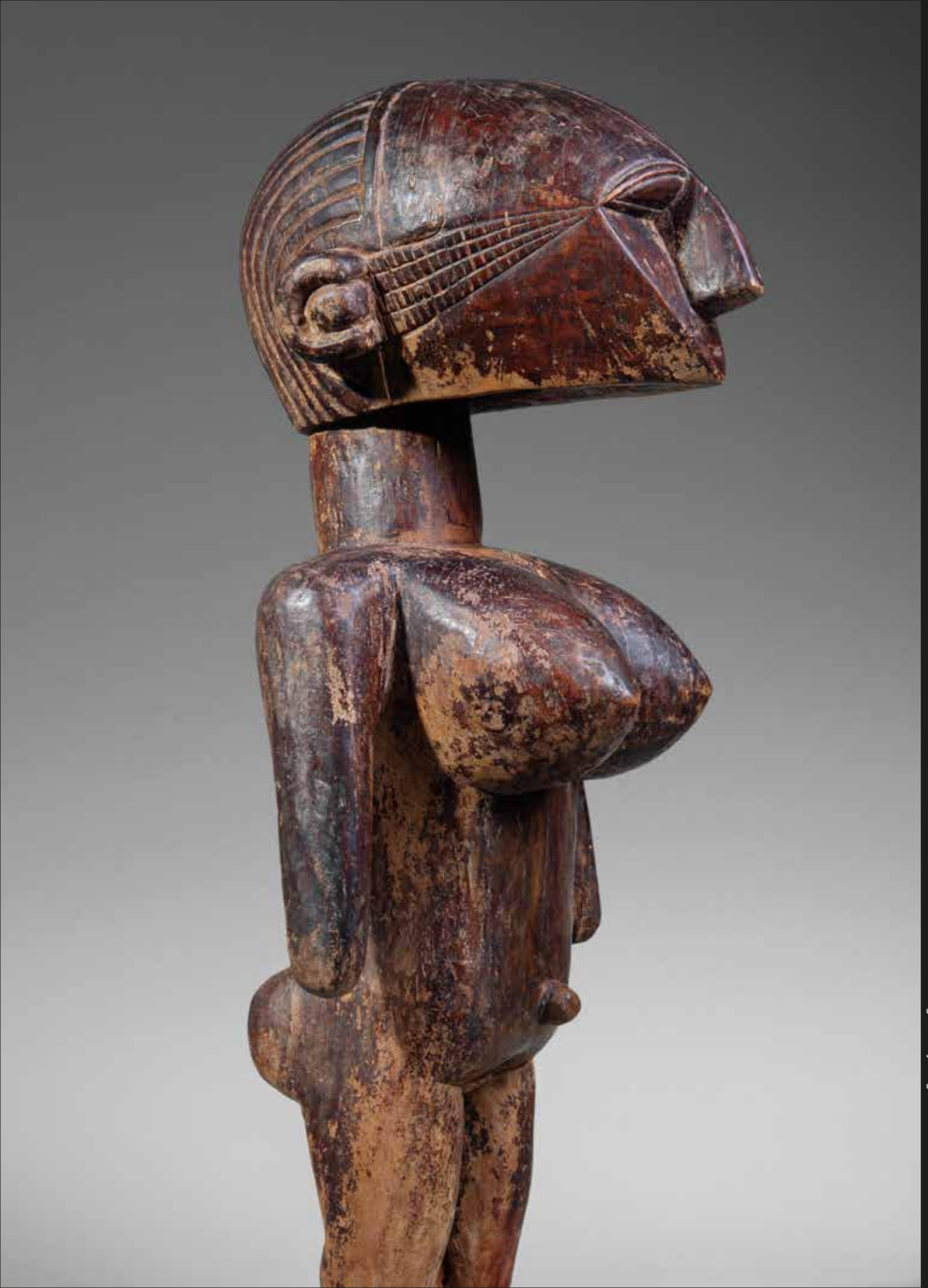
Amadi Famori Camara
Symbolic figure of girl prior to initiation

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1935
Teak
83x23x34

Power figure

Master Amadi Famori Camara

Power figure



3

Figure of young initiate

Amadi Famori Camara
Symbolic female figure

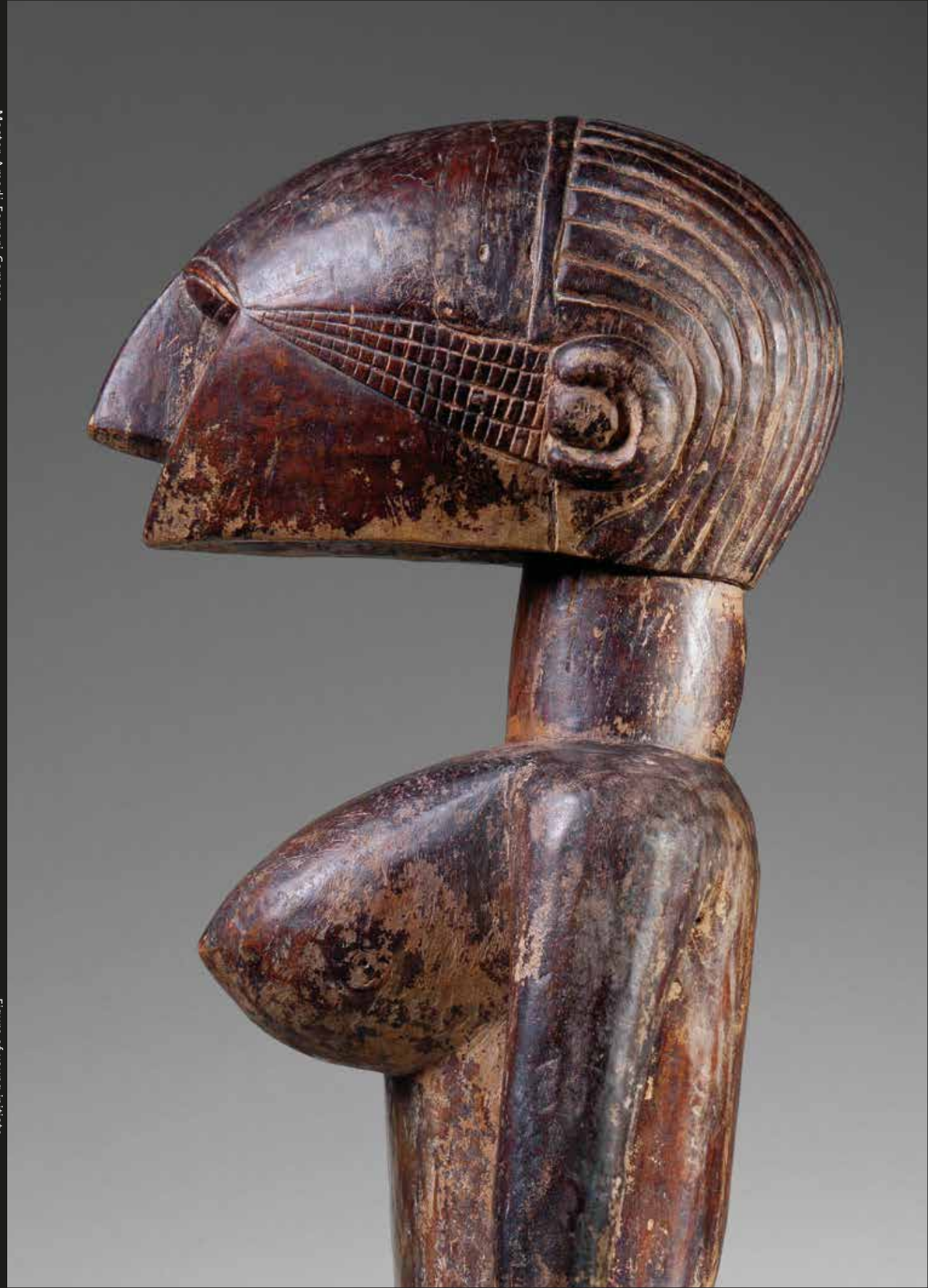
Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1932
Teak
89x37x37

Similar visual characteristics can be found in Rietberg Museum's Nimba sculpture, *Art of Black Africa*, Elsy Leuzinger, E-10 (detail), 1971.
Photo: Unknown photographer.

Figure of young initiate

Master Amadi Famori Camara

Figure of young initiate



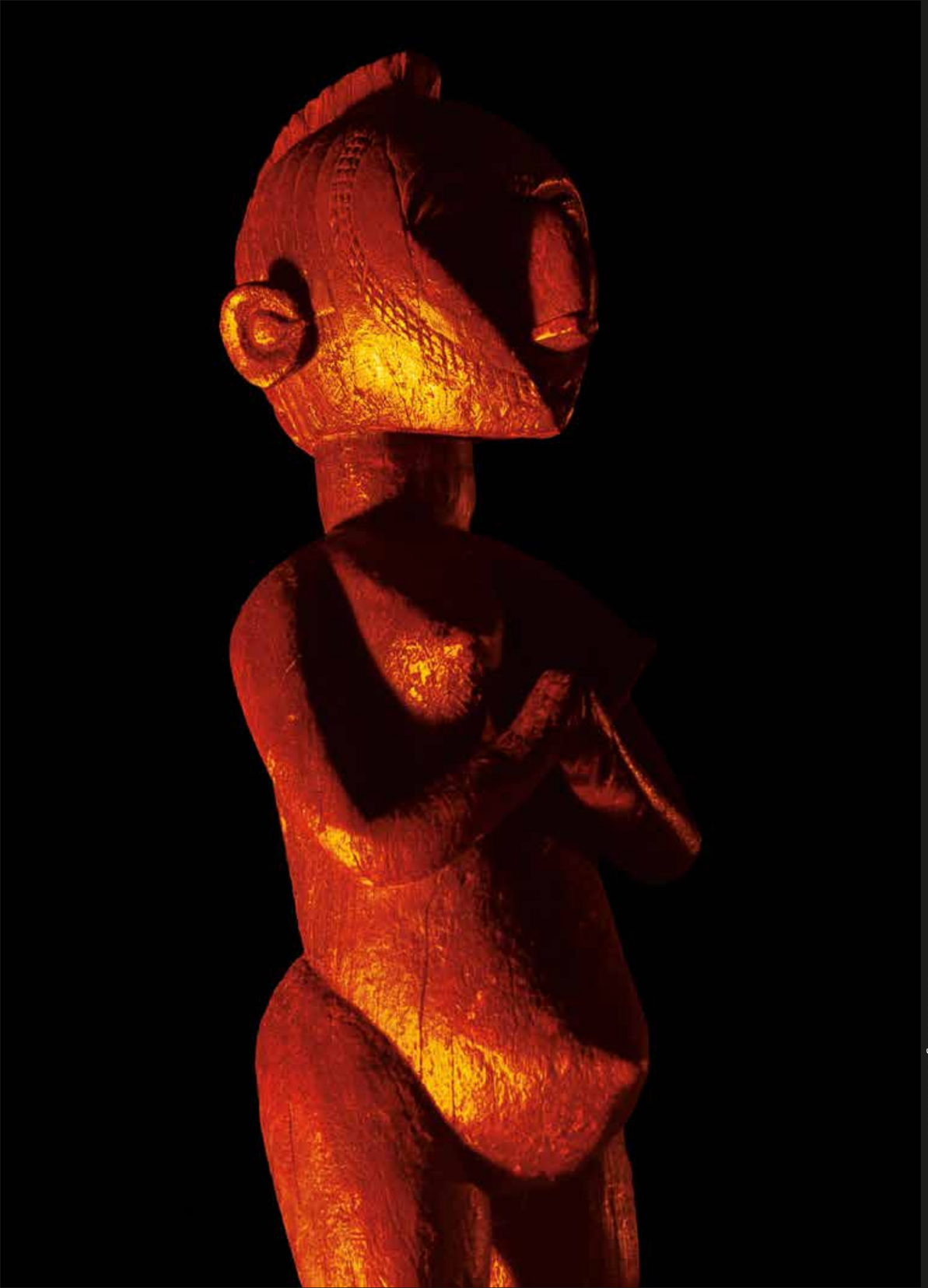
4

Divination figure of initiate

Amadi Famori Camara
Symbolic figure of an *A-tekan* female society member

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1950
Teak
88x25x24

This symbolic figure has a triangular, pointed Nimba face, a form echoed in her breasts and by the position of her arms, which reflects a Christian influence.
Her pointed belly was designed for ritual touching.



Divination figure of initiate

Master Amadi Famori Camara

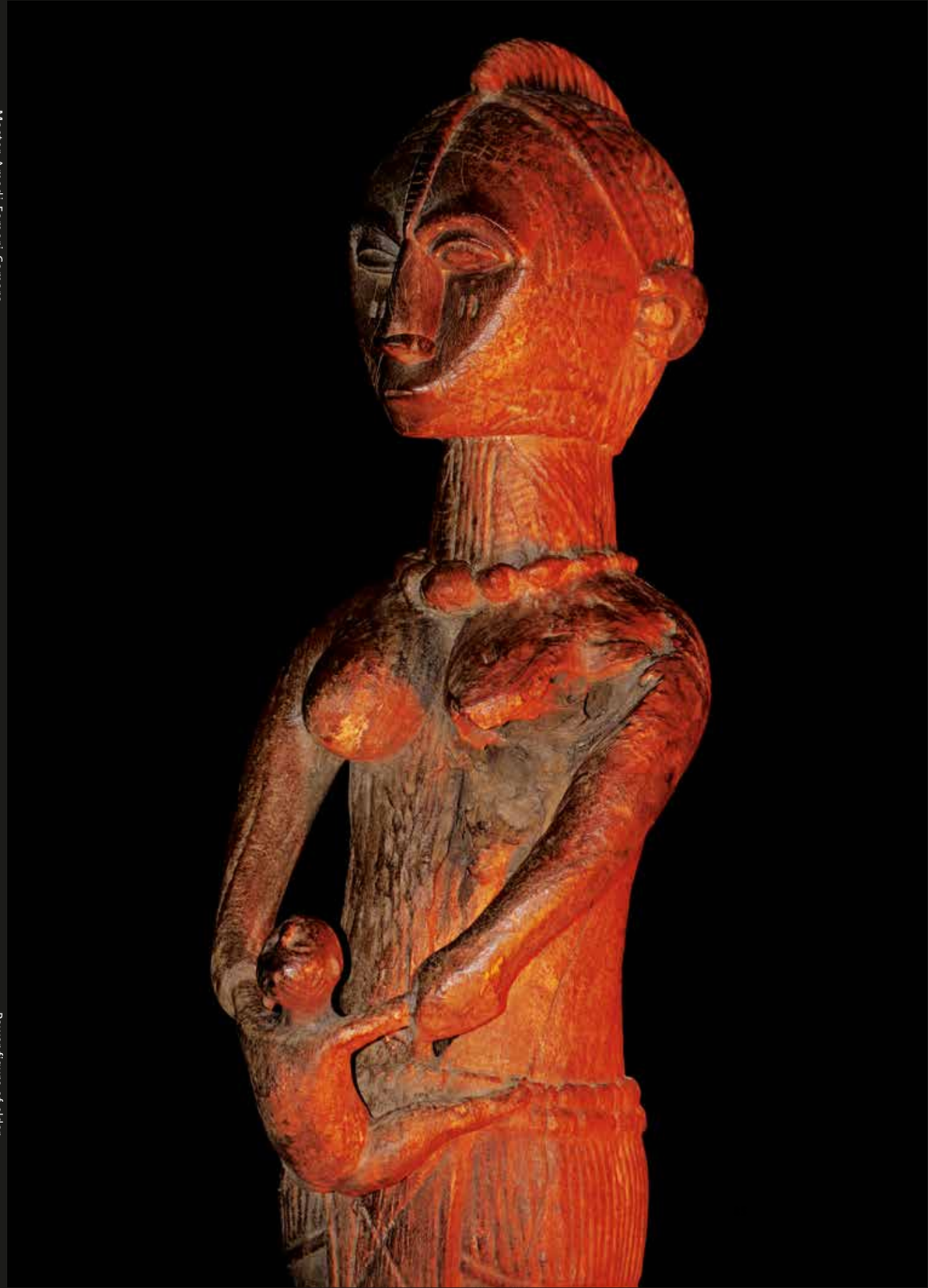
Divination figure of initiate

Master Amadi Famori Camara

Initiate divination figure

Master Amadi Famori Camara

Initiate divination figure

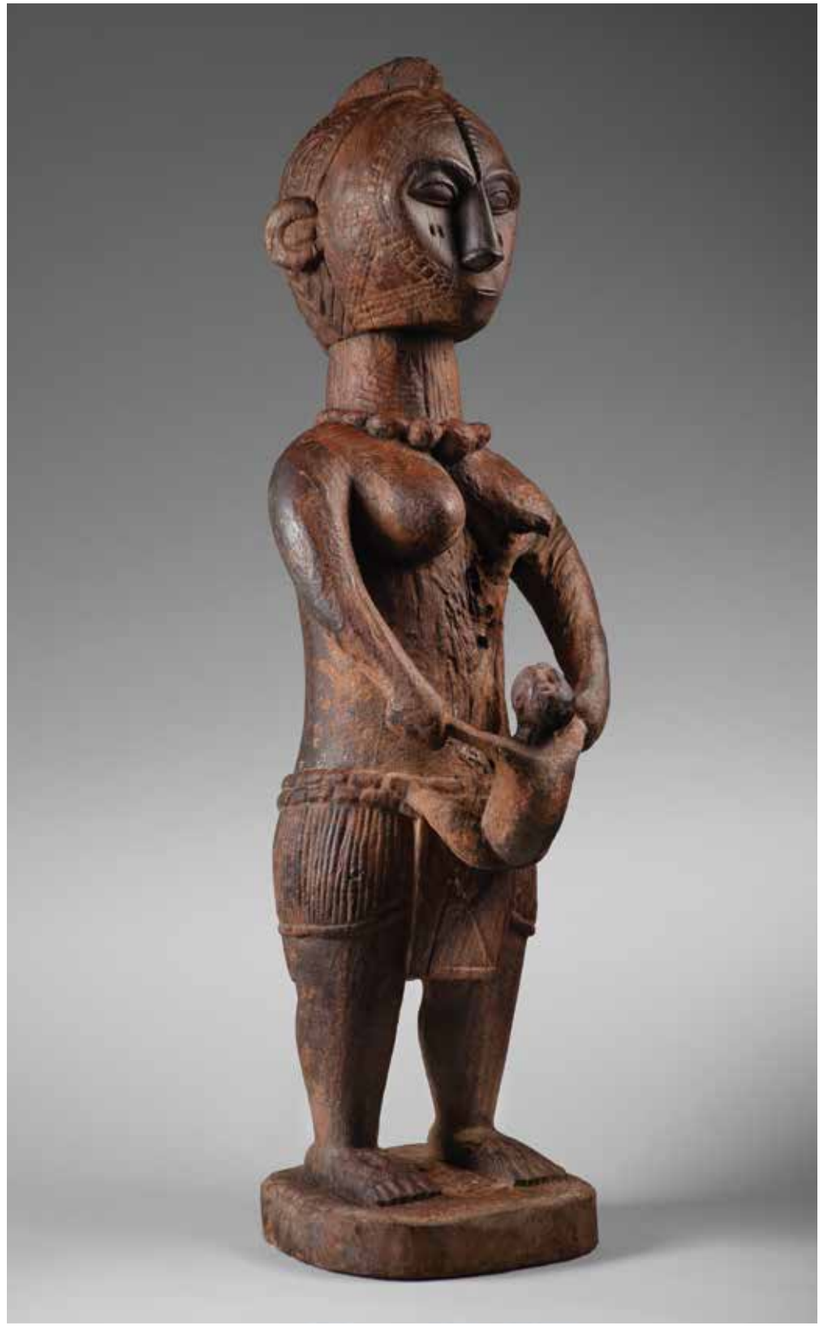


5 **Power figure of elder**

Amadi Famori Camara
Symbolic elder figure of the *A-tekan* women's society

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1930
Teak
98x32x37

Maternity is the first condition for joining the *A-tekan* society. Childless women were perceived as girls throughout their lives.



Power figure of elder

Master Amadi Famori Camara

Power figure of elder

Power figure of elder

Master Amadi Famori Camara

Power figure of elder

6

Nimba headdress
(D'imba in Susu)

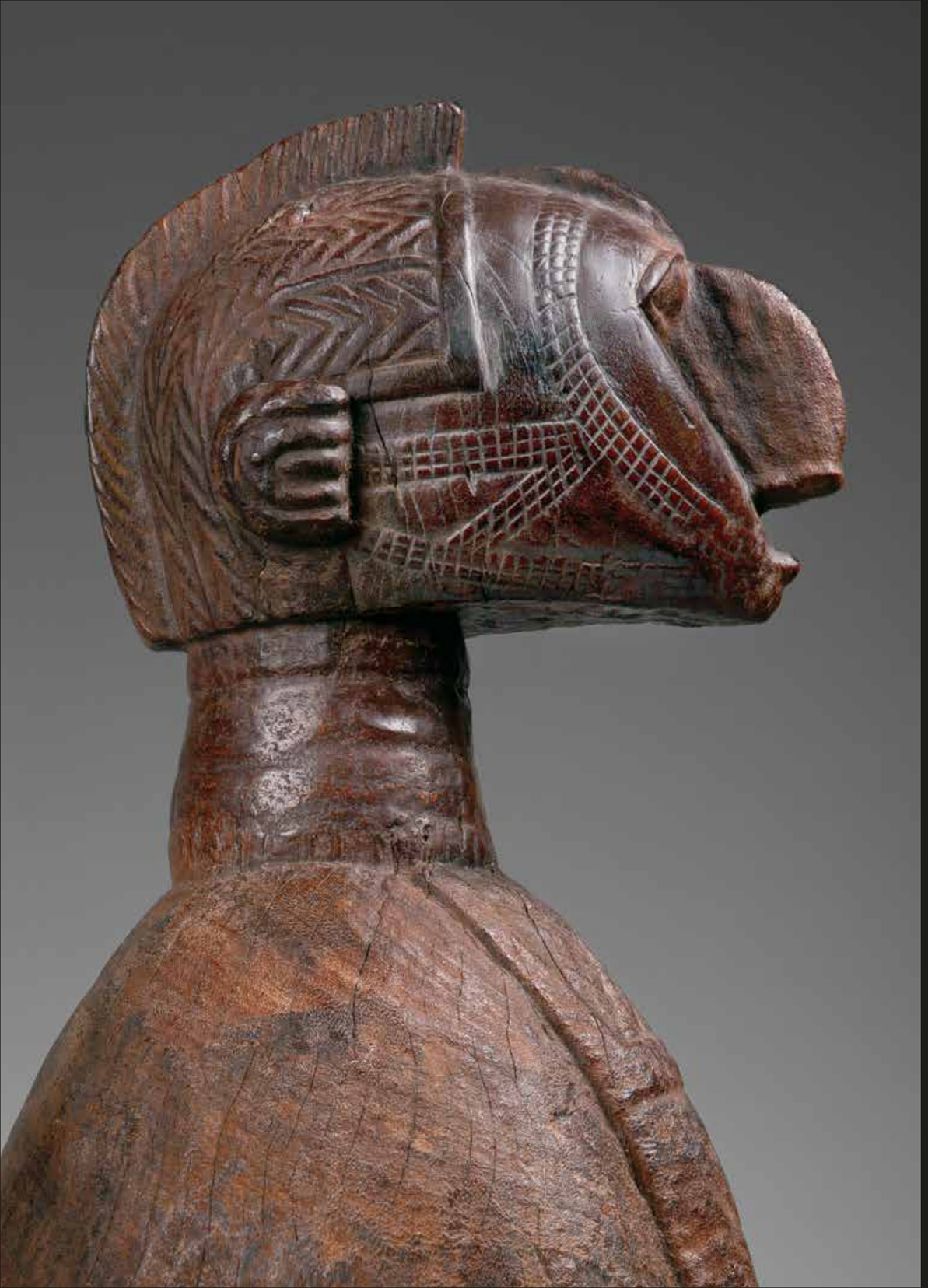
Famori Camara the Elder
Shoulder mask, small Nimba (Pefet)

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1880
Wood
74x34x34

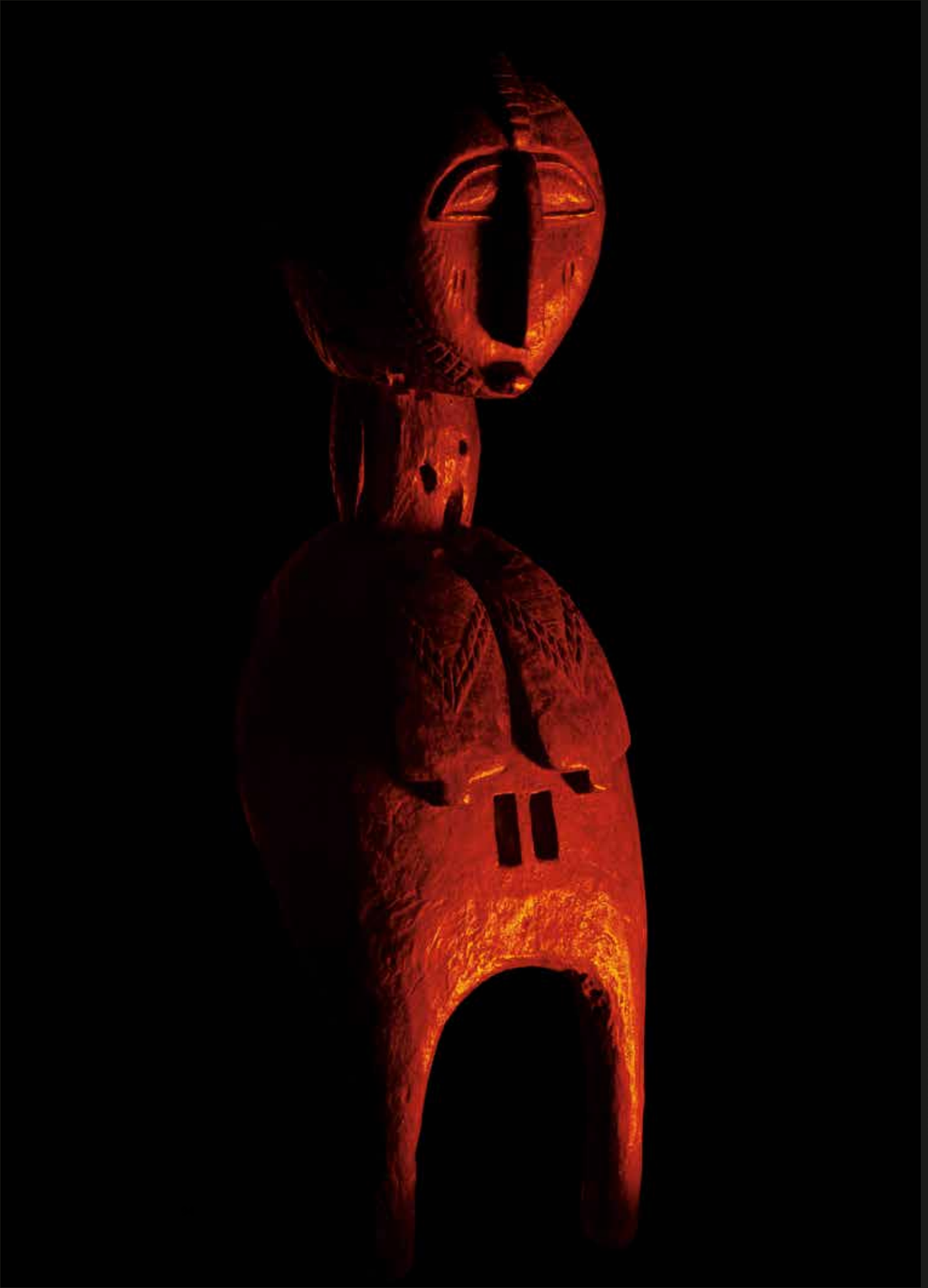
A Nimba designed to be carried on poles during the funerals of community elders. Attributed to Famori Camara's father.

Nimba headdress

Master Amadi Famori Camara



Nimba headdress



7

Bridal festivities shoulder mask
(Zigurin – Wonde)

Amadi Famori Camara
Shoulder mask, *Zigurin – Wonde* (young bride)

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1940
Teak
96x32x34

A shoulder mask used to accompany a bride while being carried on the shoulders of young men to her new home.

Bridal festivities shoulder mask

Master Amadi Famori Camara

Bridal festivities shoulder mask

To Share a Cricket

When the children find a treasure–
Perhaps they've caught a cricket together–
They'll split their loot in equal ways
Among each other's different plates.

Wisdom in the Elder's Cauldron

If you are in a foreign land
And you need a helping hand
Find the elders of the town
And honor them by bowing down.
For they were born there, in the place–
Have mastered every path and space–
And in their minds they grip a vise
Full of the wisdom of the wise.

MASTER BARBADY FOTÉ CAMARA

Master Barbady Foté Camara

Barbady Foté Camara was born in Tolkotch-Taigbé Falaba 1890. Master Foté Camara was one of the most prolific and renowned Baga artists of the first half of the twentieth century. His fame spread widely throughout the Bagaland. Camara's distinctive figurative style became extremely popular with the women's secret associations, which, acting as the artist's patrons, commissioned him to create numerous works for their ritual paraphernalia. Possession of a piece of such caliber and its presentation to new initiates during ceremonies was considered a sign of great status and a symbol of power for the entire secret society.

Elder's mask, Fote' Camara,1950.

Woman's coiffure decorated with a net and fish motifs, symbolizing abundance in the catch and fertility.
Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

Many of Camara's surviving works depict fish interlocked in elaborate female coiffeurs. Such figures have elongated ringed necks symbolizing beauty, downcast eyes, and a closed mouth denoting secrecy and unity. Their braided hair represents self-care and cultivation, and images of fish refer to an abundance of game and fertility (fishing was one of the women's societies' duties). Camara's ability to combine all these symbols in a unified sculptural figure is indeed unique.

Elder's serpent mask emerging after sixty years of being hidden in the sacred wood, 2018.
Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Fishing in Katako's lagoons, 2021.
Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Most of the masks of the men's associations were destroyed in the 1957 jihad since they were regarded as armaments. Targeted by rebellious youth, their destruction was one of the first acts of the revolution. The importance of those that survive (Mask Museum, Scotland) has never been realized. Three such masks by Camara were uncovered from the Katako hoard. Two of them were featured in the Israel Museum Jerusalem exhibition, *Nimba, Baga Art and the Great Mother*. A third one was exhibited in the Museum of Islamic and Near Eastern Cultures, *Gold Road Encounters*.

Members of the Baga's women association fishing, Kalaktshe, Guinea, 1942. Museum Quai Barnsley Photographic Archive. Photo: G. Labitte.

Camara's hand and manner are easily recognizable. His compositions are static, frontal, and lavishly decorated, recalling classic European portraits. His beautifully rendered creations embody archaic monolithic omnipotent beings.

Camara's talent was so unique that his art was recognized by everyone without the help of any distinctive mark as his signature. One is always drawn to his naturalistic all-consuming eyes, which, when illuminated by a red cascade of flickering flames (unlike the even, monochrome lighting in the museum), as they were in the women's sacred forest, immediately spring to life.

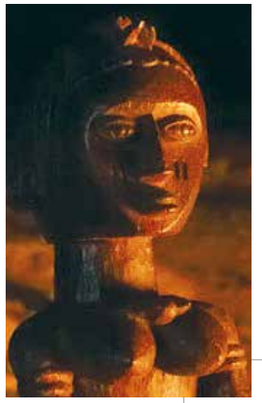


Figure of young member, Foté Camara, 1942. Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

Baga youth, Rio Nunez, 1927. Photo: H. Bowald.

Coiffure with embedded "medicine", 1970th. Smithsonian Libraries Image Gallery. Photo: Dr. F. Lamp.

Foté Camara's greatness is evident in his archetypical portraits of Baga females, each representing a specific age group – young initiates, members, and elders – each typical of the group rather than a portrait of a specific individual. When the idealized images are set alongside actual photos of Baga members taken years apart (the statues were made in the 1930s, years before the older and younger members posing with them in Katako's forest were born), Camara's ability to capture the essence of his Baga patrons becomes apparent.

Master Foté Camara's oeuvre. Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

Andre Foté Camara, Master Camara's great-grandson, Faraba, Guinea, 2020. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

The works demonstrate incredible eidetic ability, especially bearing in mind that without any preparatory sketches, all the statues were carved from extremely hard wood with a single hand equipped with a traditional adze. Camara's figurative aspirations marked a clear break from tradition, which was usually strictly observed. Thus, for example, the sound of the modern flute was banned from all festivities due to its similarly to the sound of a spirit. Nevertheless, Foté Comara's art was praised by his peers and achieved immense popularity.

Post-independence, his art was carefully guarded, kept away from the sight of the uninitiated for more then half a century, and made public only upon Henriette Conté's death.

Master Camara was succeeded by a son, born in 1930, with whom the practice ended. His grandson, Andre Foté Camara, was happy to recall his illustrious grandfather. He is a devout Muslim who is making his living by fishing in the River Nunez Delta.

Katako's sacred forest, Guinea 2017. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Master Barbady Foté Camara

Power figure held by young association member

1

Power figure held by young association member

Barbady Foté Camara
Figure of youth holding a power figure

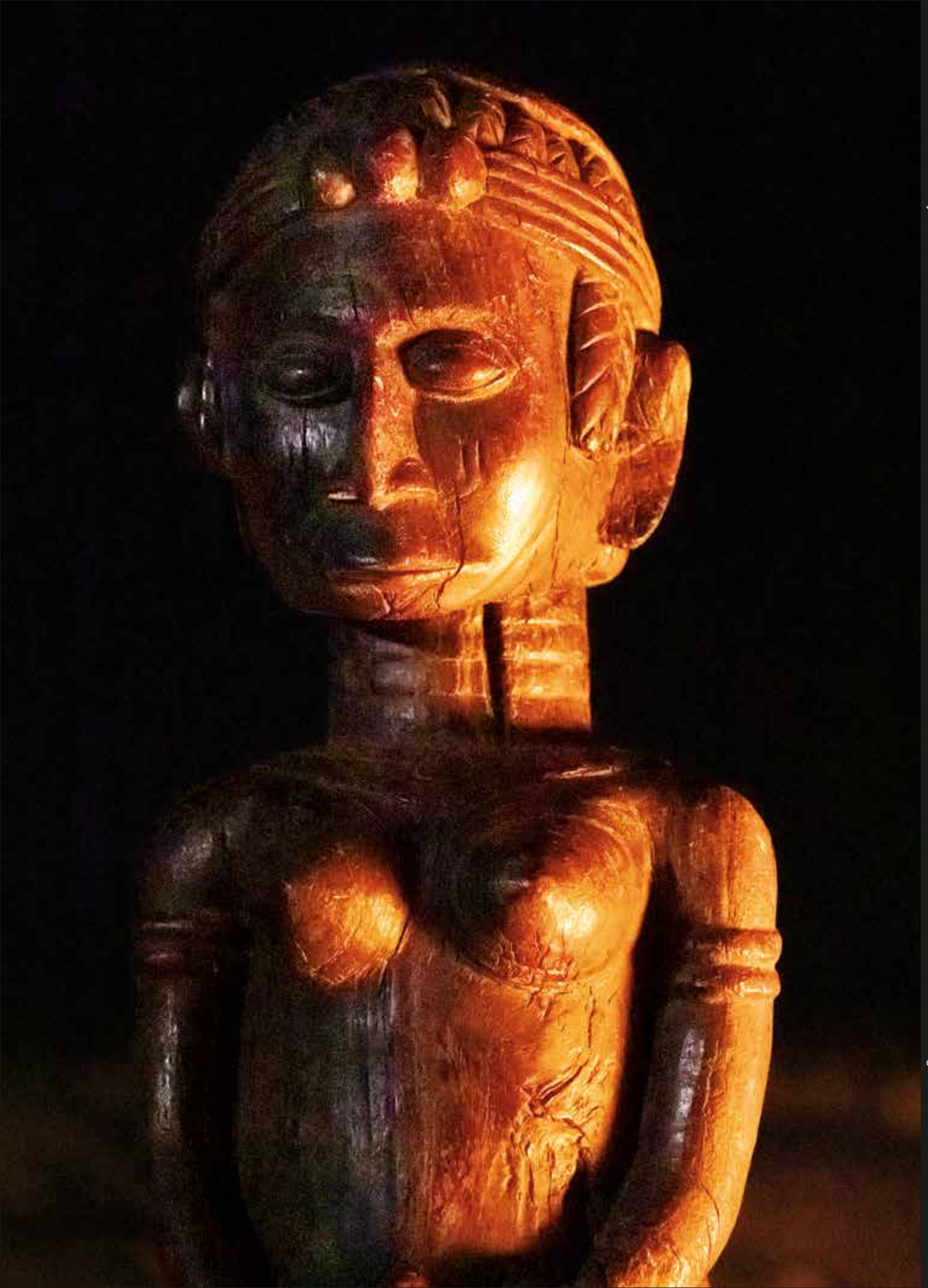
Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1942
Teak
92x32x39

A young member of the women's association holding a power figure in her hands; its small size and appearance underscore a concentrated power. The youth's coiffure contains magical substances.

Power figure held by young association member

Master Barbady Foté Camara

Power figure held by young association member



Master Barbady Foté Camara

Power figure of elder

2

Power figure of elder

Barbady Foté Camara
Elder's figure of the *A-tekan* female society

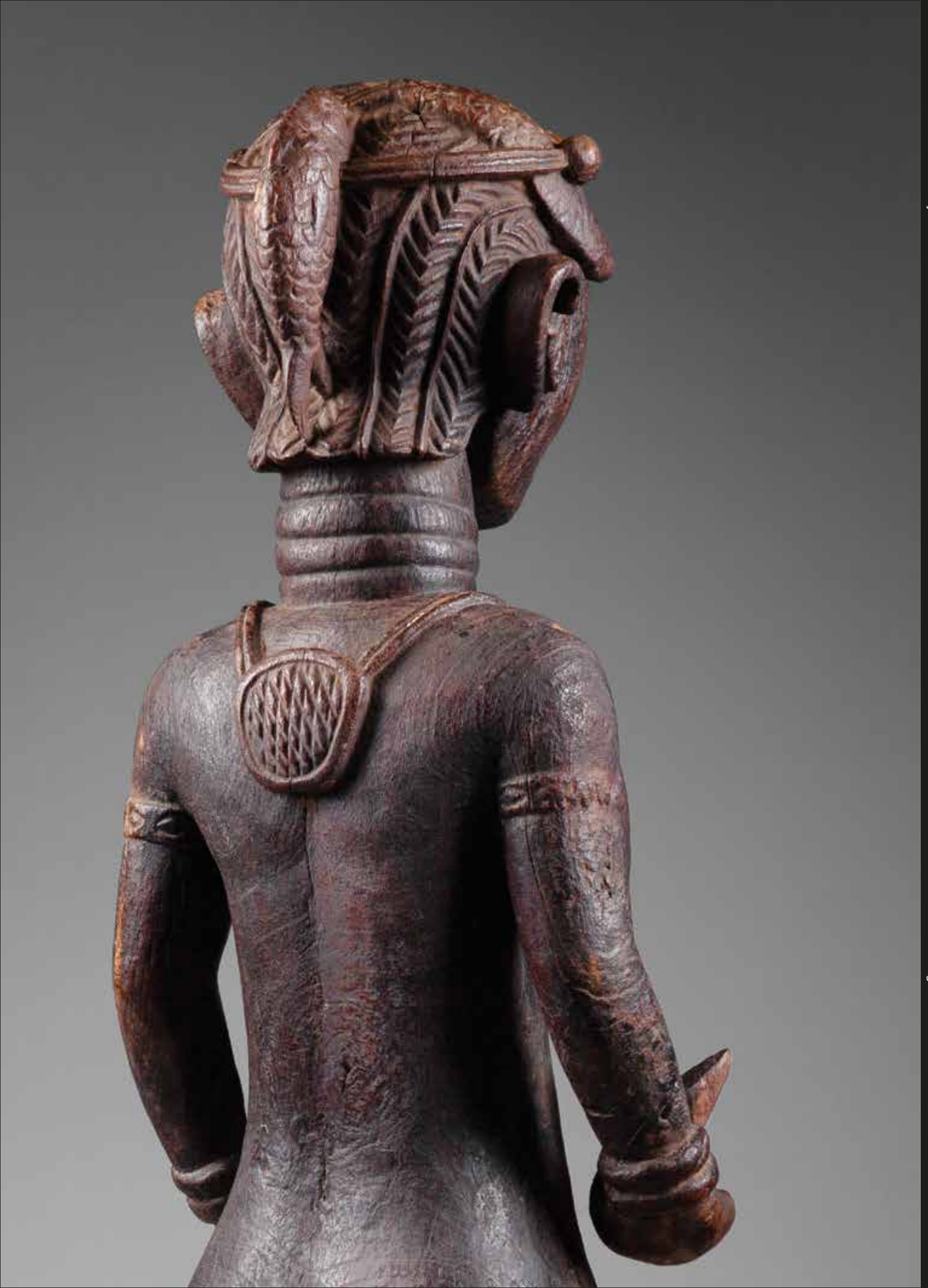
Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1935
Teak
82x27x26

Her small size underscores her power, while her joined hands support pregnancy, representing the power of women as the creators of life.

Power figure of elder

Master Barbady Foté Camara

Power figure of elder



Master Barbady Foté Camara

Figure of association member

3

Figure of association member

Barbady Foté Camara
Figure of a women's society member

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1950
Teak
102x35x33

The head of this ideal figure is adorned with fish caught in a net, symbolizing plentiful fishing, a livelihood that formed one of the responsibilities of the women's associations. She holds a fishtail and a gourd serving as a vessel.

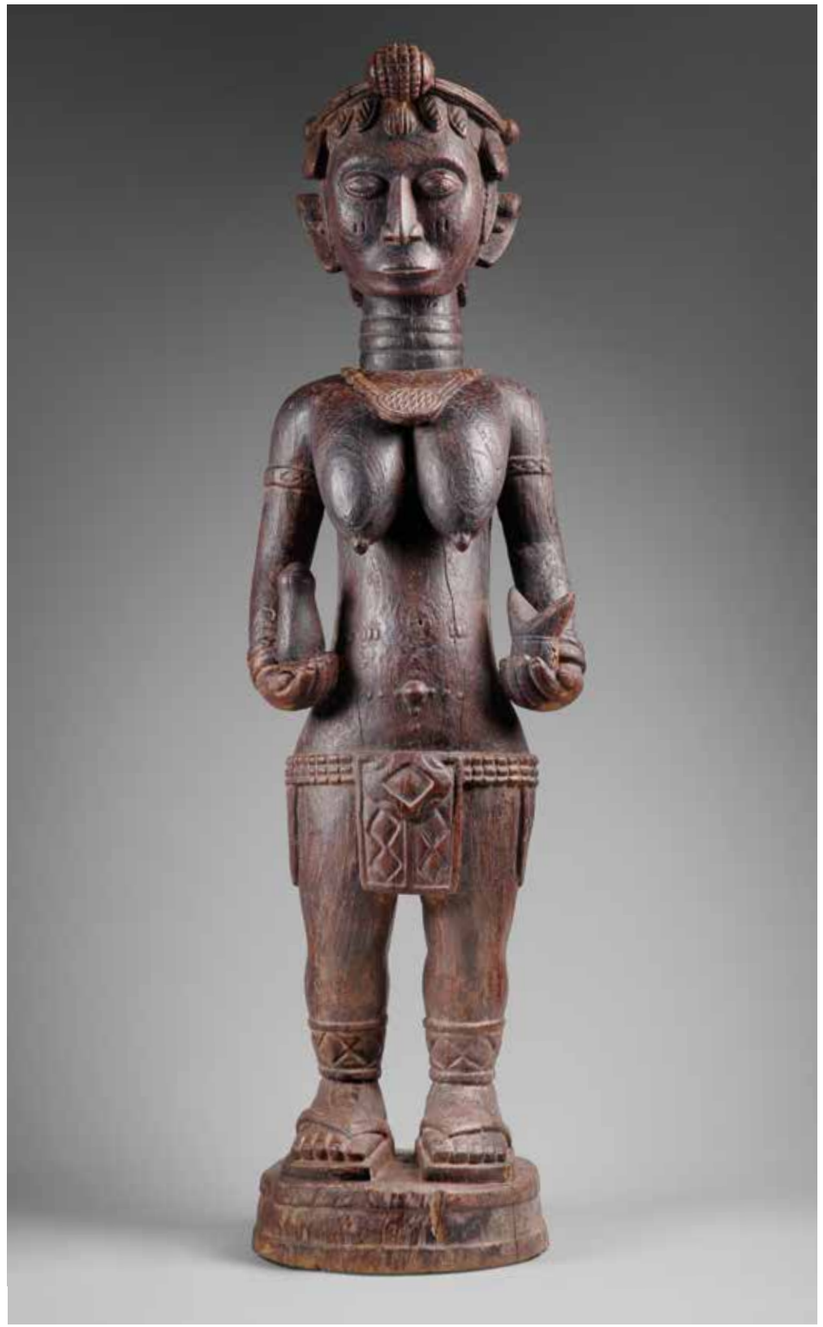


Figure of association member

Master Barbady Foté Camara

Figure of association member

Photo: Christopher Herwig

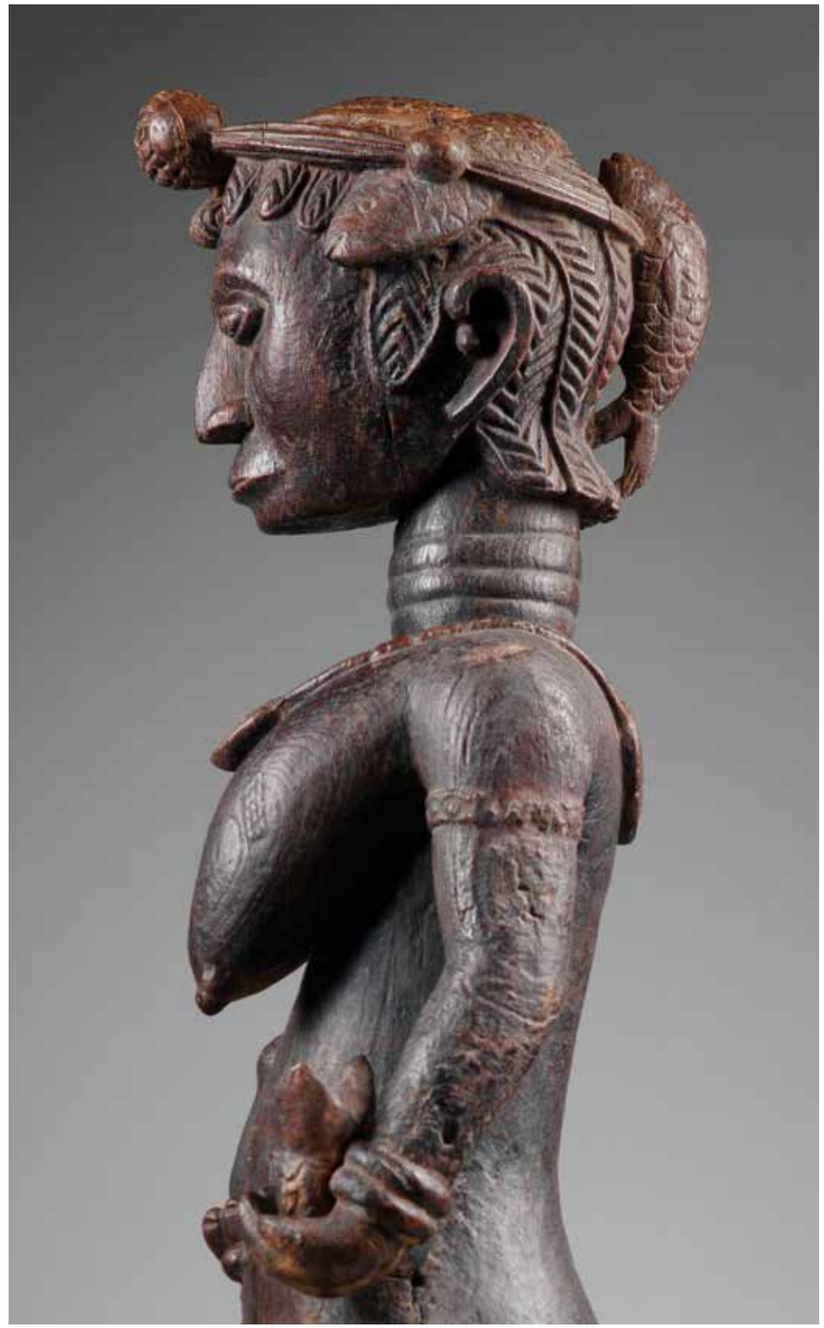


Figure of association member

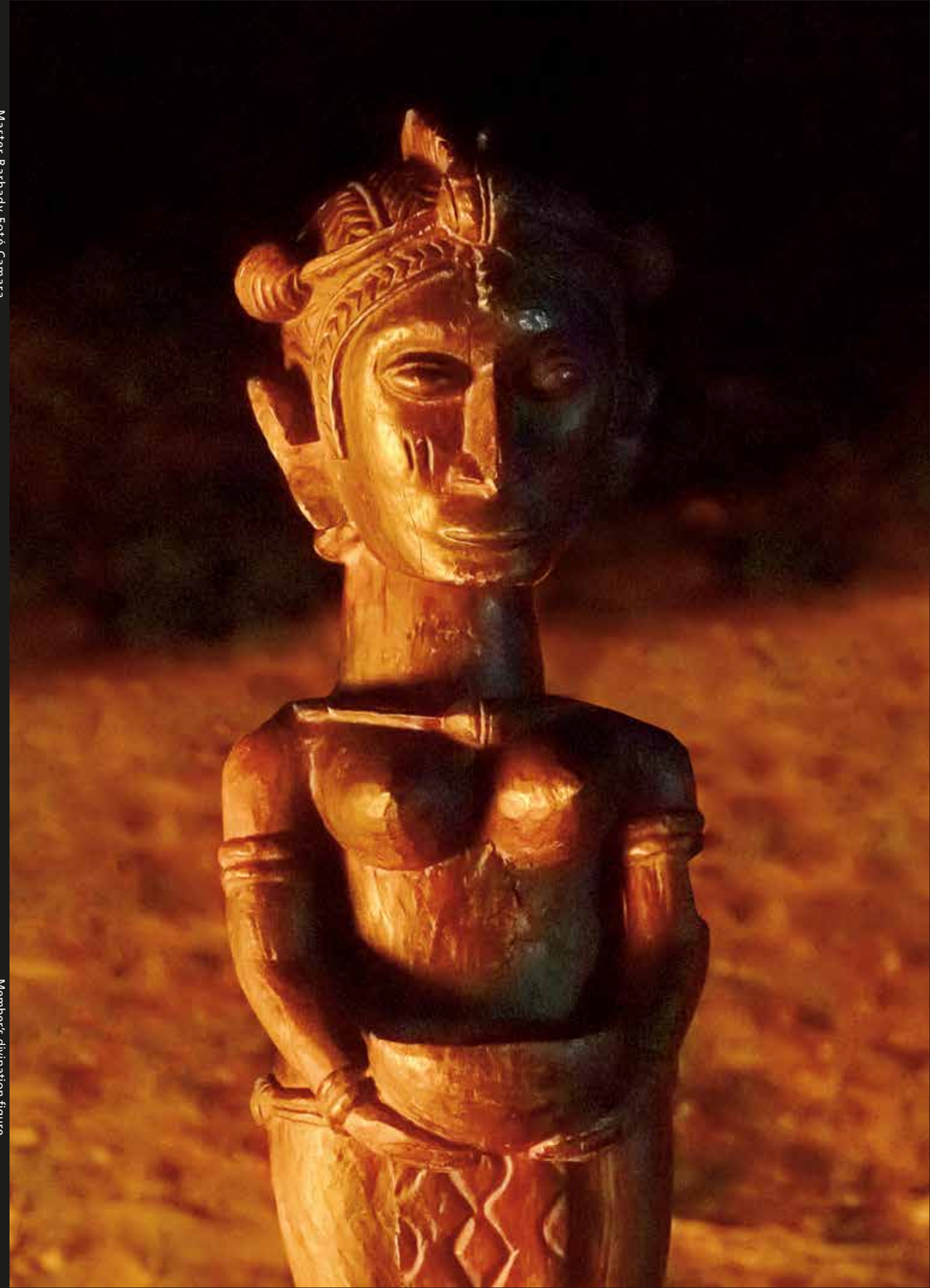
4 **Member's divination figure**

Barbady Foté Camara
A female initiate holding an offering

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1942
Teak
90x30x37

Figure representing a member of the women's association. Her elaborate coiffure and jewelry underscore her status.

Master Barbady Foté Camara



Member's divination figure

Member's divination figure

Master Barbady Foté Camara

Member's divination figure

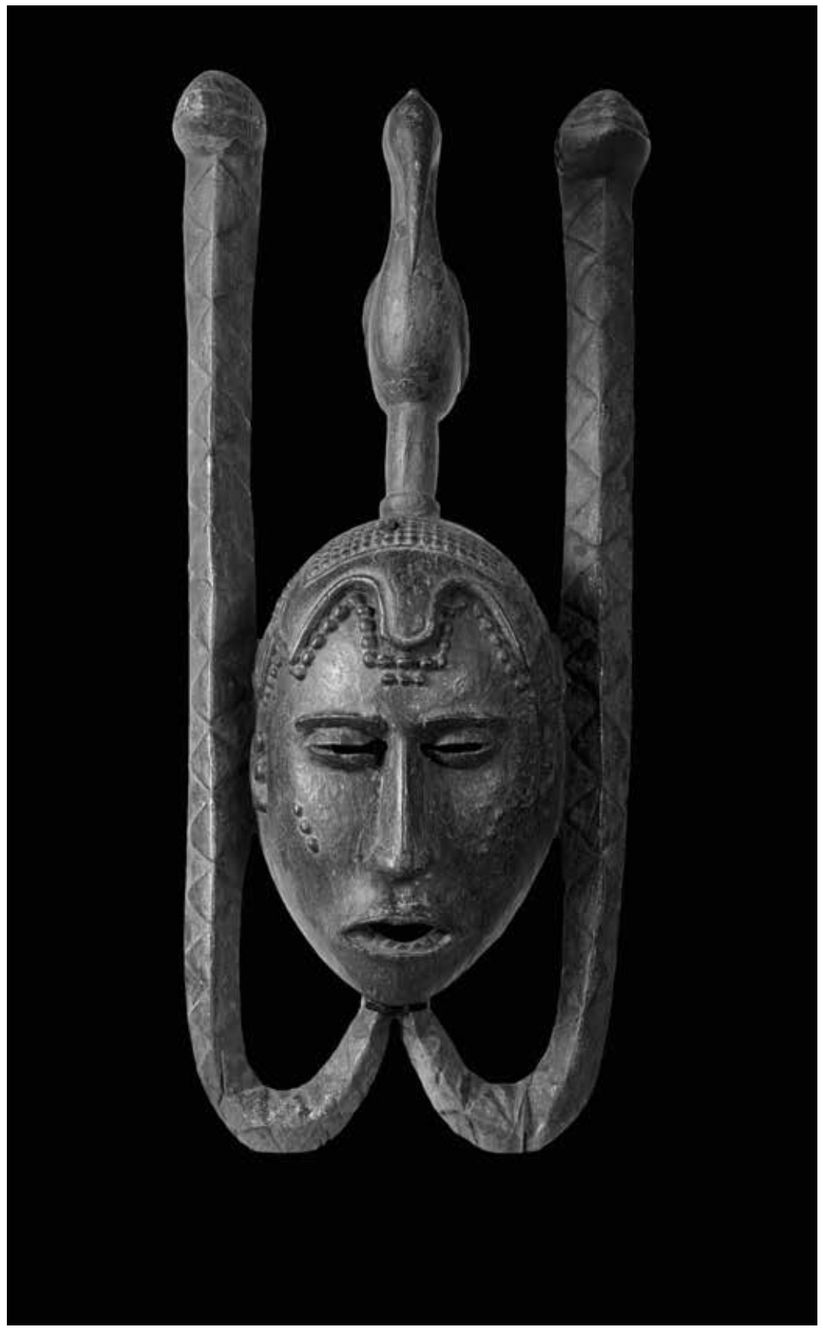
5

Mask of men's association elder

Barbady Foté Camara
Elder's mask from the sacred forest

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1950
Teak
74x33x21

This mask is adorned with two snakes and a pelican – a totemic animal that taught the Baga's ancestors to fish,. The snakes are depicted similarly to the serpent *Mantsho-na-Tshol* the master of medicine and the community's power symbol.



Mask of men's association elder

Master Barbady Foté Camara

Mask of men's association elder

6 **Mask of men's association elder**

Barbady Foté Camara
Elder's mask from the sacred forest

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1950
Teak
101x22x22

Masks of this kind were used in the men's associations to cast spells. Most of them were destroyed during the youth revolt and the jihad in 1957.

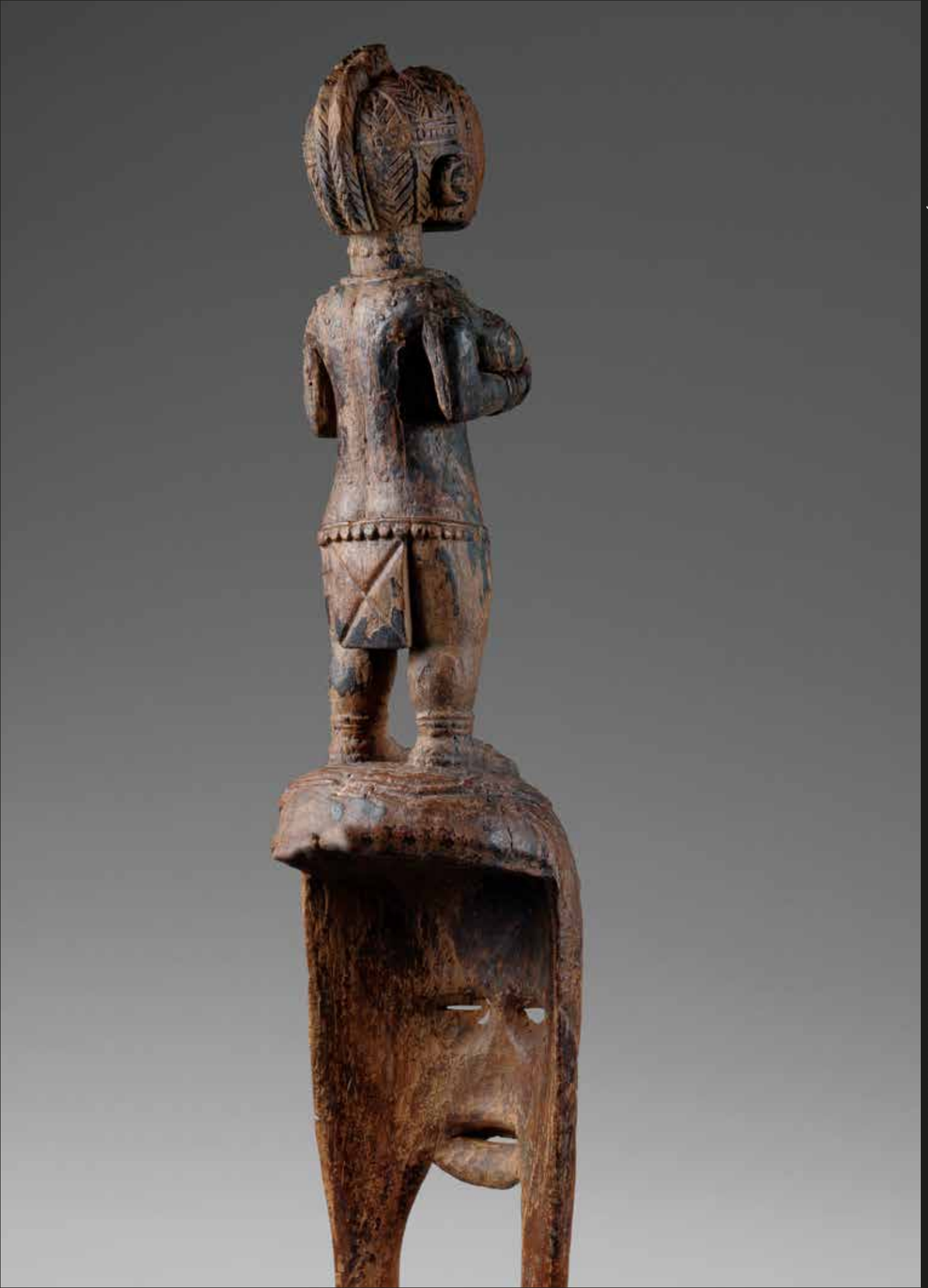
Master Barbady Foté Camara

Mask of men's association elder

Mask of men’s association elder

Master Barbady Foté Camara

Mask of men’s association elder



Master Barbady Foté Camara

Mask of men's association elder

7

Mask of men's association elder

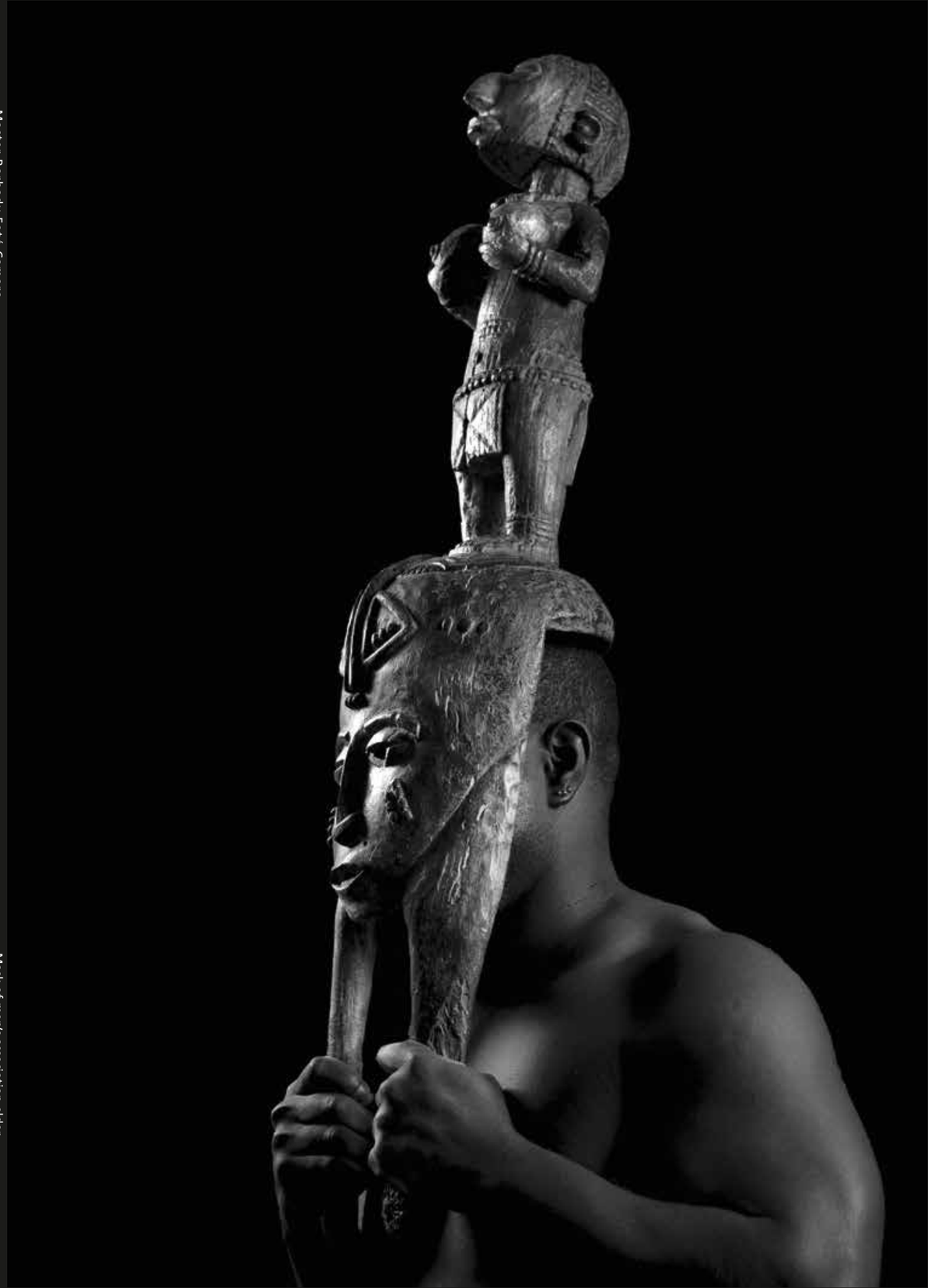
Barbady Foté Camara
Elder's mask from the sacred forest

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1940
Teak
92x28x22

A female figure with a Nimba face adorns this ancestor mask, endowing it with power and providing complementary forces attributed to women, which men lack.

Mask of men's association elder

Master Barbady Foté Camara



Mask of men's association elder

Master Barbady Foté Camara

Personal divination figure

8

Personal divination figure

Barbady Foté Camara
Figure intended for personal divinations

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1952
Teak
43x14x16

The loop atop the figure's head was designed to be threaded with palm leaves symbolic of purity. The statue is attributed to a student of Camara.
A similar Kneeling divination figure is in the Saint Louis Art Museum (19:66/E9347.19).

Personal divination figure

Master Barbady Foté Camara

Personal divination figure

9 **Staff of women's association elder**

Barbady Foté Camara
Ceremonial staff of the head of the women's association.

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1945
Teak
63x16x19

A member of the female association seated in a ceremonial pose upon a fish with another fish adorns her head. The staff symbolizes fertility and plentiful fishing. The folds in her neck attest to her beauty and being selected by the spirits to represent them in our world.

Master Barbady Foté Camara

Staff of women's association elder

10

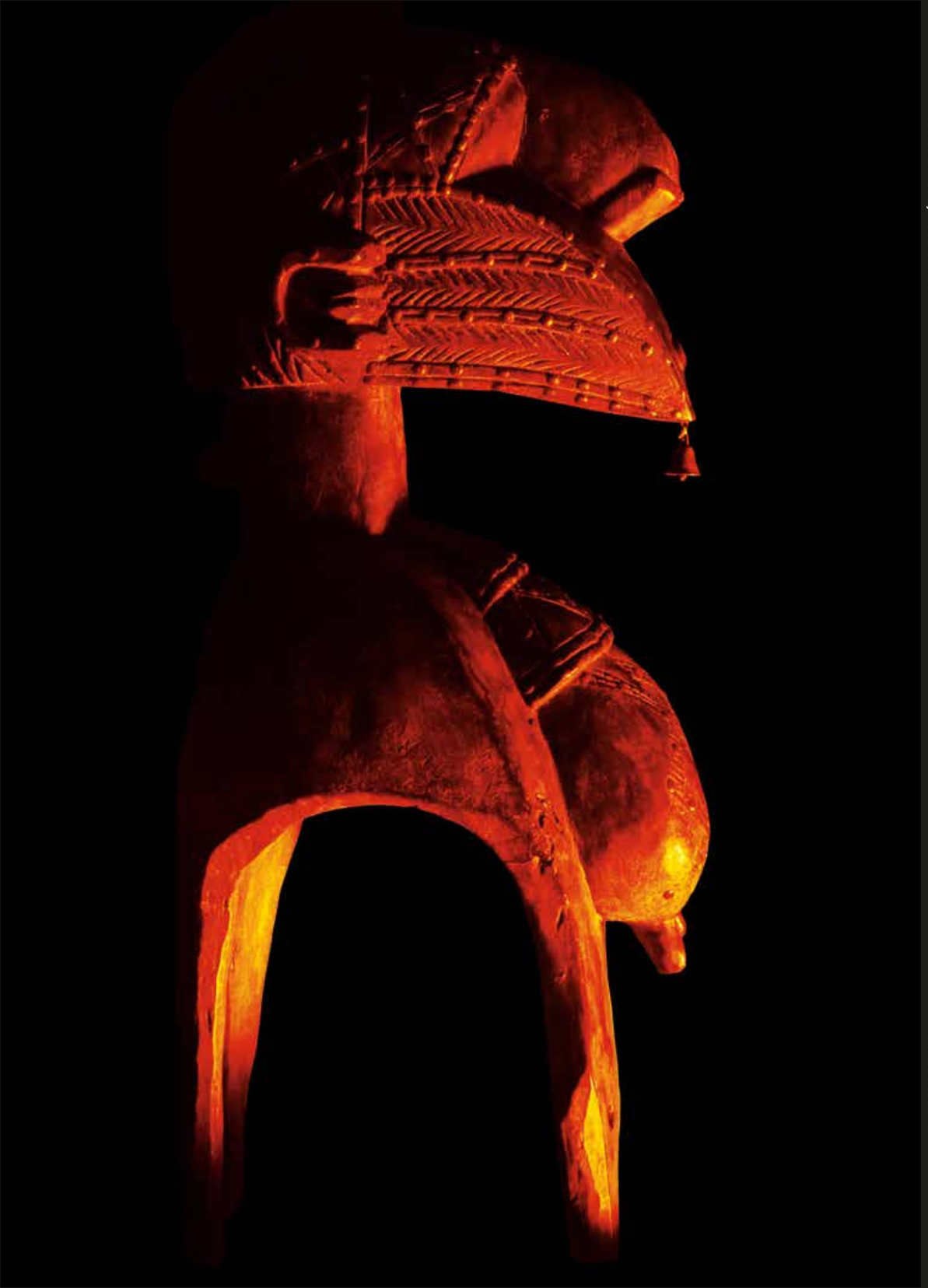
Nimba headdress
(D'imba – in Susu)

Barbady Foté Camara

Baga people, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1954
Teak
102x46x34

Nimba headdress

Nimba headdress



Nimba headdress

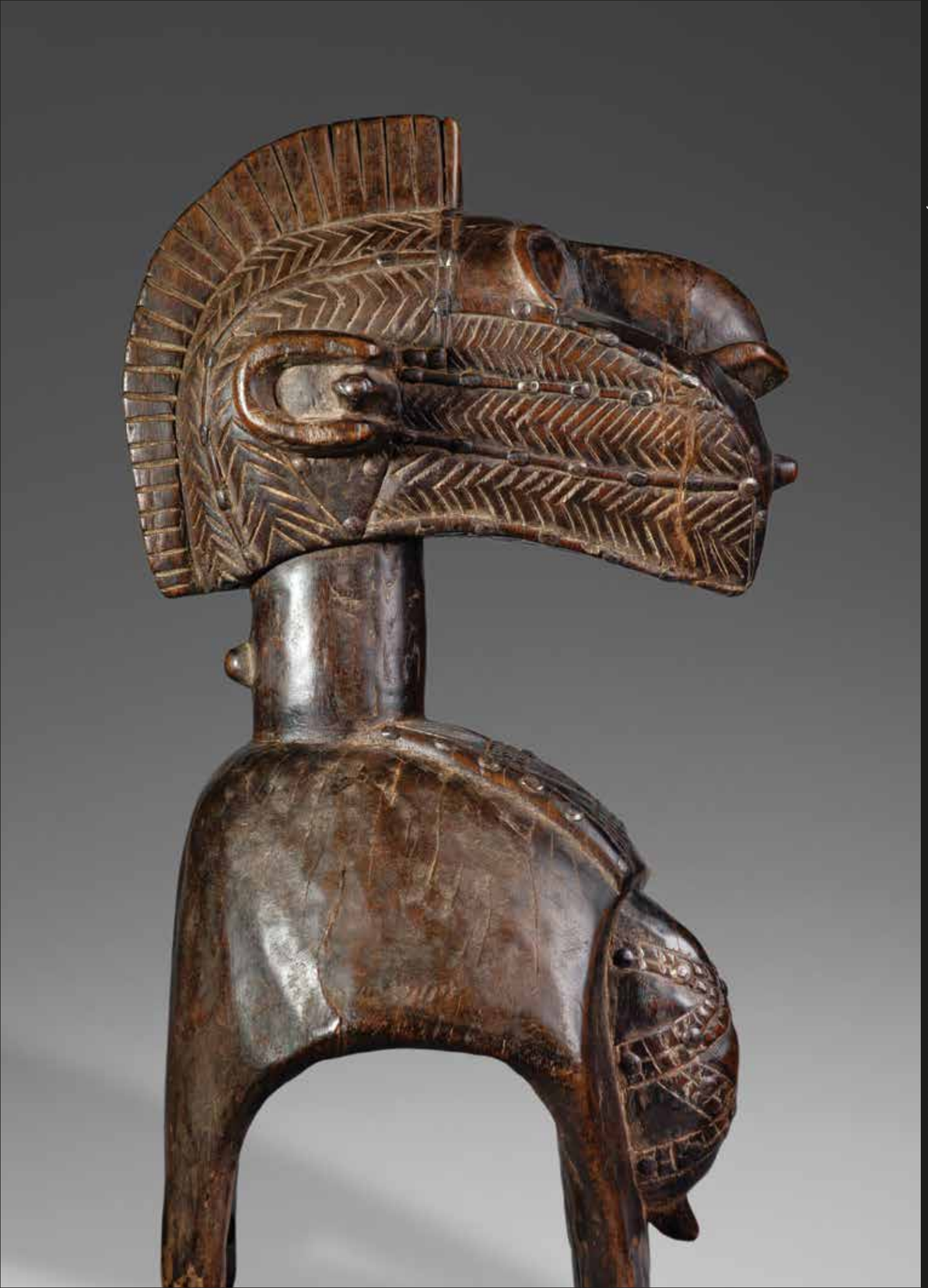
11

Small Nimba headdress
(D'imba – in Susu)

Barbady Foté Camara
Nimba for carrying at funerals

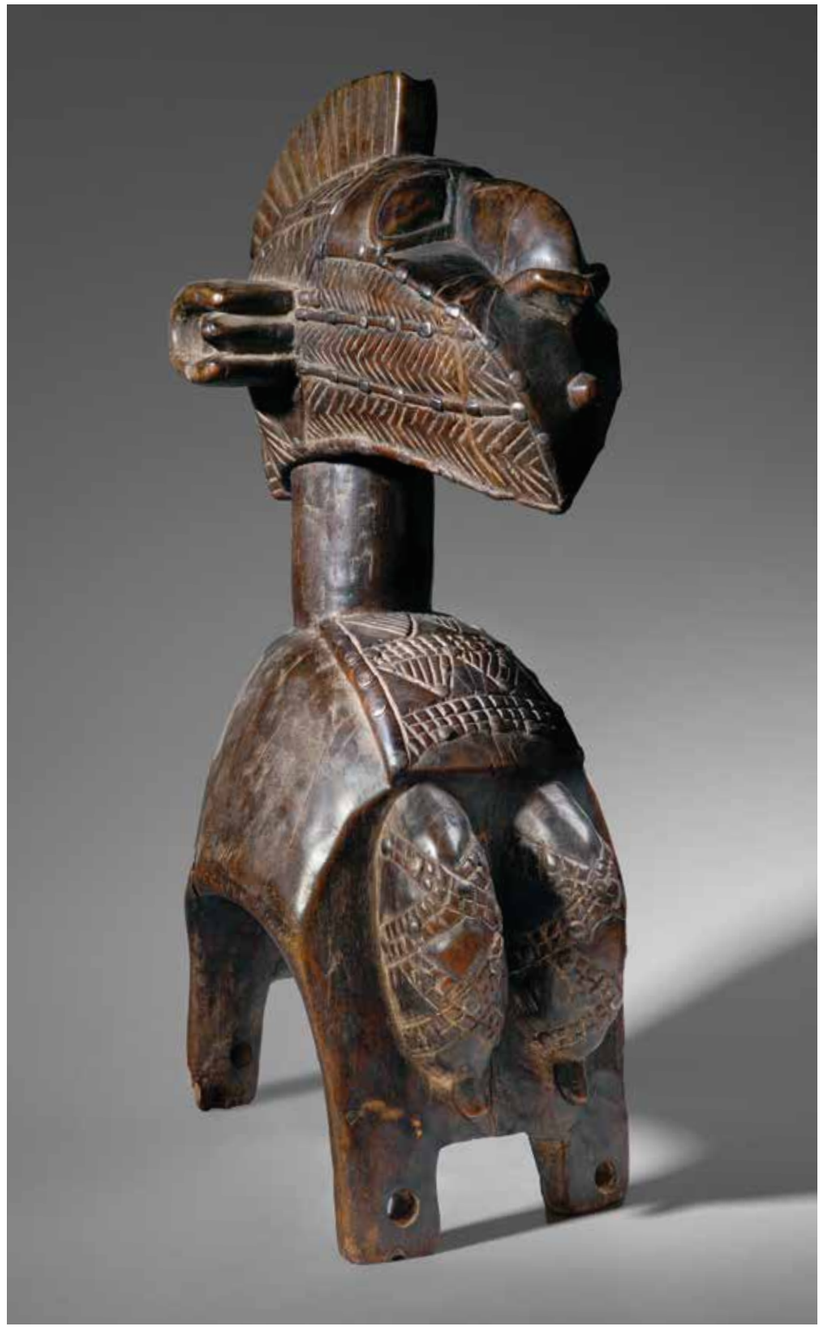
Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1938
Teak
862x18x52

The figure of the Nimba is carried on poles. The metal nits become burning hot due to the heat of the nocturnal fires and emit light which follows the dance movements.



Master Barbady Foté Camara

Small Nimba headdress



Small Nimba headdress

Master Barbady Foté Camara

Small Nimba headdress

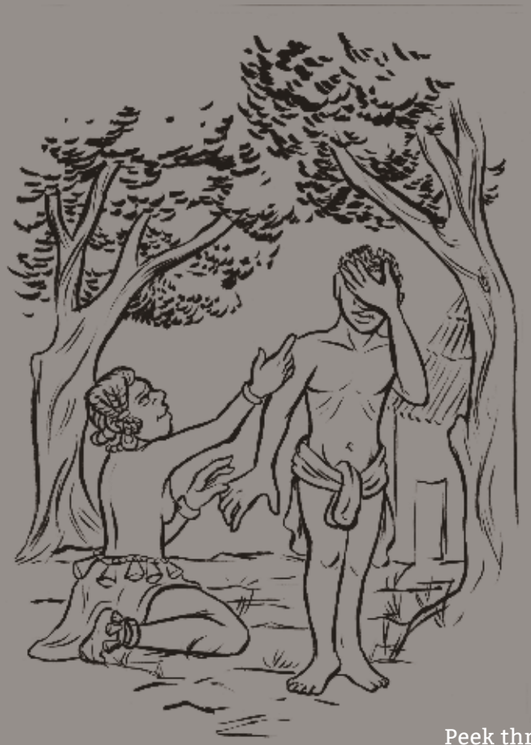
Master Barbady Foté Camara

Take Every Risk to Stay Alive

When a man isn't careful
and falls in a stream–
when he fears he is drowning
but no one hears his scream–

He'll grab any object
to save his own life:
a branch with thick thorns,
or even a knife.

When the going gets tough,
you're allowed to take
any possible lifeline
for lives are at stake.



Peek through Your Fingers

When a woman and man
make a request
To "Cover your face
With the palm of your hand
So your vision's erased."

If you are told
To close your eyes,
Peek through your fingers
So nothing can hide.

MASTER EL HADJE ALI MANIGUÉ BANGOURA

Master El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura

El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura, was born in Tolkotch, Taigbe Kamala, 1895.
One of the most striking sculptures to emerge from the Katako hoard is that of an elderly female baga, 102 cm tall. The statue, its face a blend of human and Nimba, and its exaggerated breasts and genitalia, symbols of age and maturity, depicts the Baga ideal of the great mother; one who has given birth to many and is now an elder nourishing her community.

Statue by M. Bangoura emerging from Katako wood, Guinea, 2018. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

The figure's face and breasts have been polished by countless caressing hands, whose ritual repetitive movements from top to bottom, from the cheeks down to the breasts, can be easily traced. When illuminated as intended by the flickering light of natural flames, the true nature and power of the statue becomes apparent: a mother solemnly holding a dead child's body in her outstretched hands in a gesture of compliance, dignity, and grief. This work was later joined by three additional pieces from the estate of Guinea's First Lady Henriette Conté to form a group of four major works, all clearly crafted by the same hand.

As was common, the unique rendering of a human ear served as the artist's personal mark, thereby expressing authorship without compromising the work's liturgical powers. Among the other characteristics portrayed in the sculptures is the quest for human emotion, as evident in the powerful figure of the elder demanding total obedience, or the young disciple solemnly offering a tribute.

Petro Bangoura, born 1953, (Ali's Grandson), Faraba, River Nunez, Guinea, 2020. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

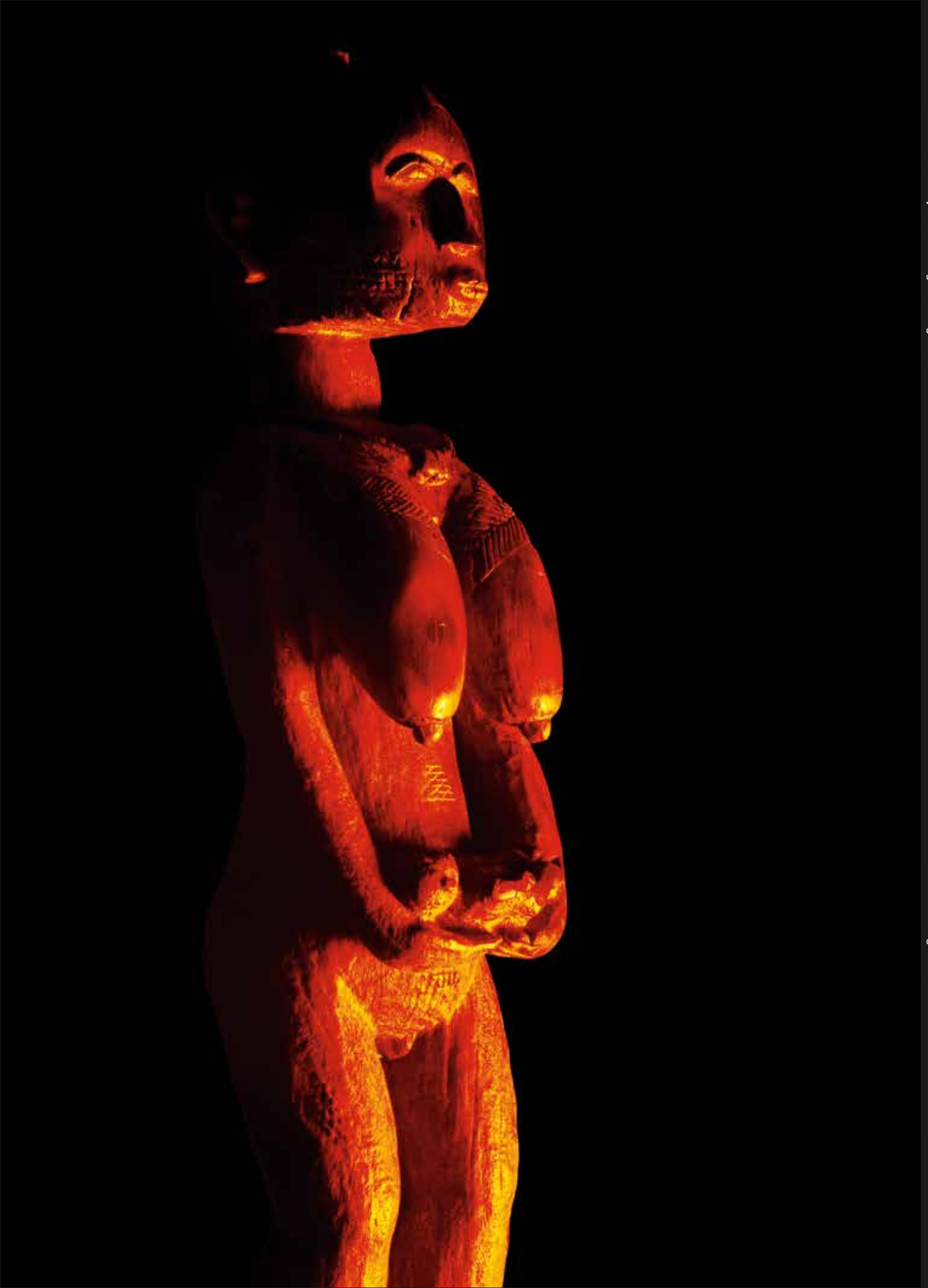
The community elders who were consulted identified the artist as Manigué Bangoura, a renowned artist from Faraba (the River Nunez Delta) who later converted to Islam and made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Master Manigué Bangoura chair, proudly maintained by his family. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

On a trip to El Hadje Bangoura's birthplace, we were fortunate to meet his grandson, Abou Bachar Petro Bangoura, born in 1953, who continues with his grandfather's profession and supplies local communities with the objects needed to maintain their community traditions.

Master Manigué Bangoura oeuvre at the Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

Petro Bangoura is the son of George Bangoura (El Hadje Bangura's son), also a known Baga sculptor. Petro Bangoura proudly sees himself as heir to his grandfather's legacy and takes special pride in using his ancestor's cherished handcrafted chair.



Master El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura

Divination figure of women's association elder

1

Divination figure of women's association elder

El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura
Symbolic figure of the *A-tekan* women's association.

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1930
Teak
102x34x35

The traces of the ritual are clearly evident on the face of this symbolic figure. Her conspicuous genitals symbolize her age. Her swollen breasts represent fertility. They are laden with milk that is not suckled, and holds a dead baby in her hands.

Divination figure of women's association elder

Master El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura

Master El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura

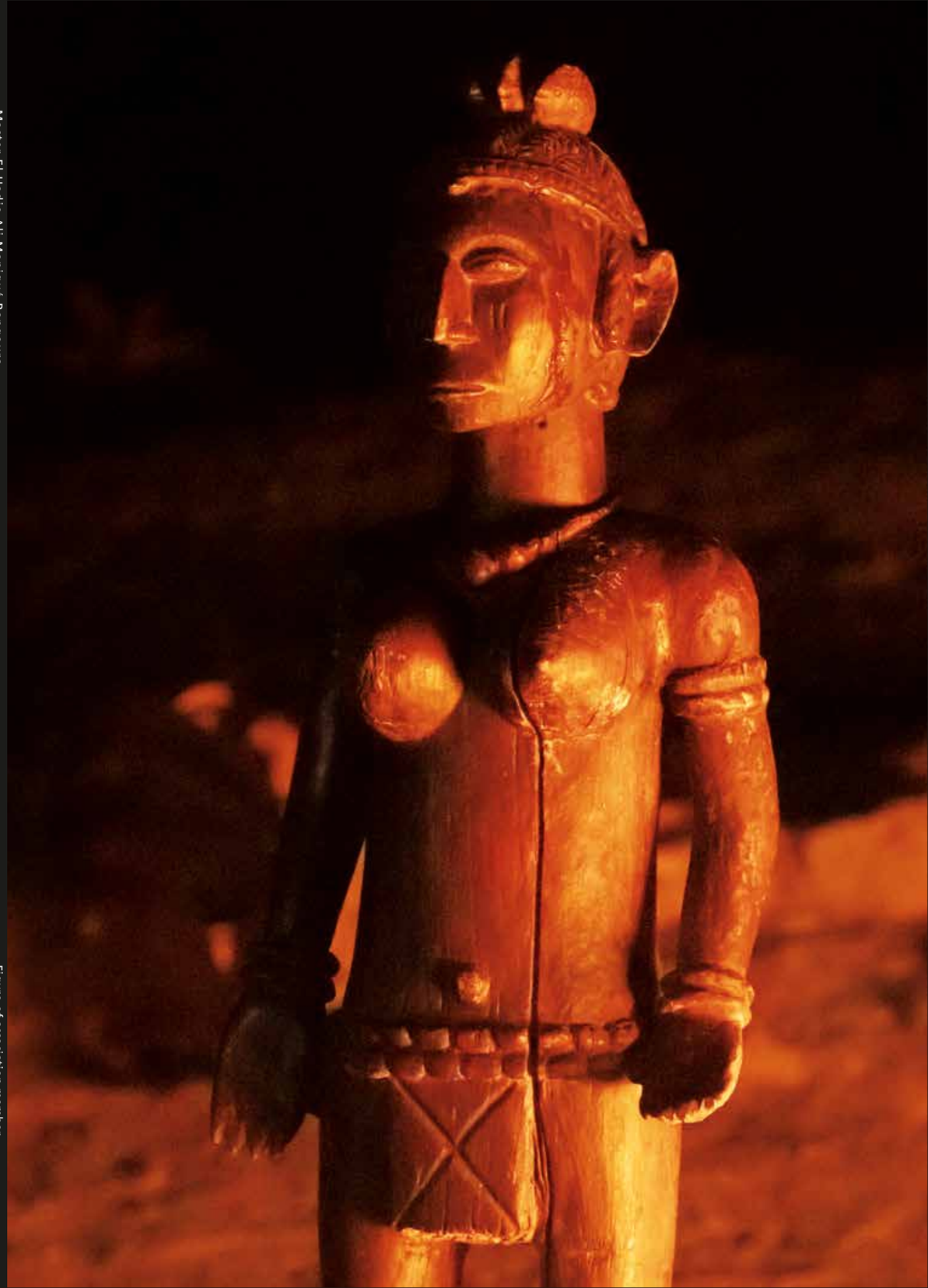
Divination figure of women's association elder

2 **Figure of association member**

El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura
Symbolic figure of a member in *A-tekan* women's association.

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1935
Teak
104x36x30

The head of this figure is decorated with fish symbolic of fertility and plenty. Her ceremonial dress is typical of Baga women.



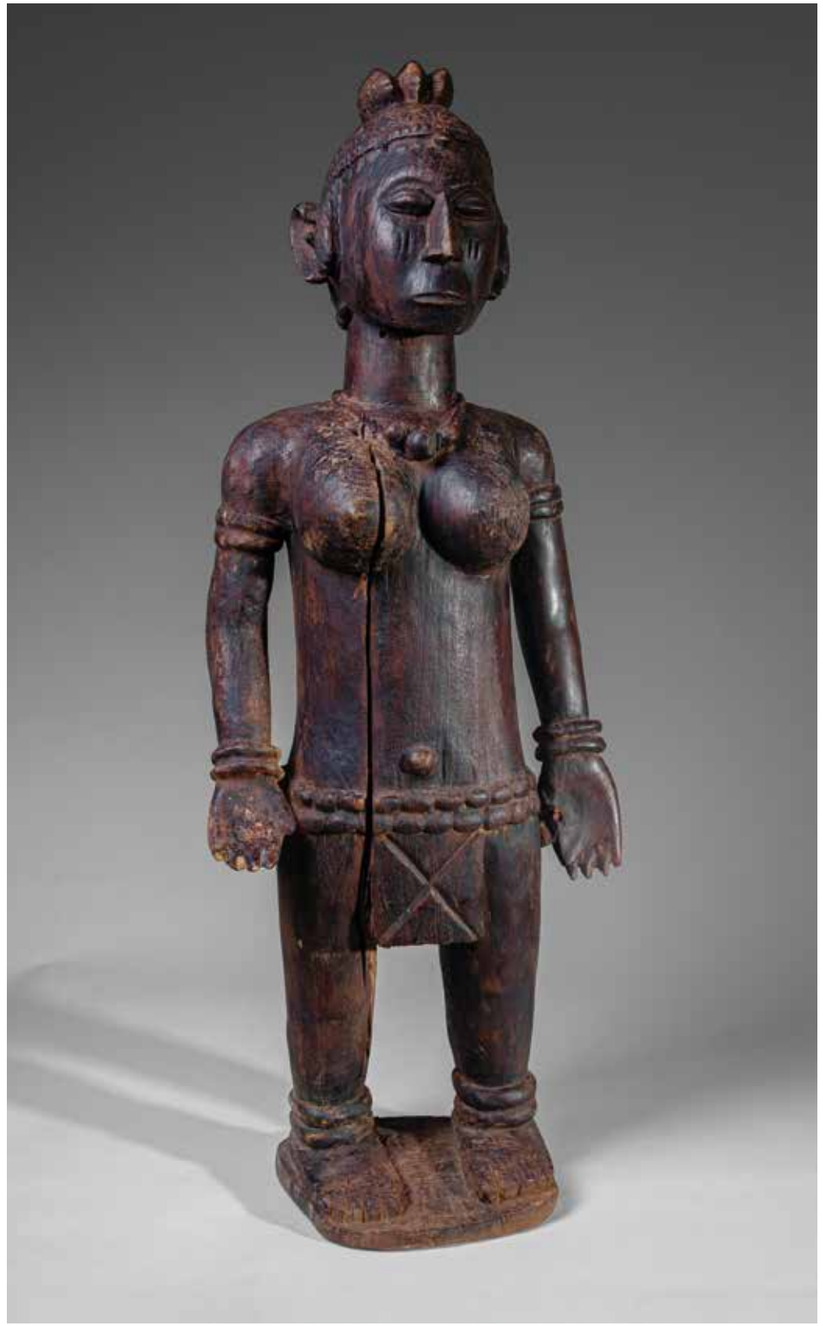


Figure of association member

Master El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura

Figure of association member

3

Figure of young initiate

El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura
Ritual figure of a young initiate in the *A-tekan* women's association.

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1935
Teak, pigmentation
82x30x37

A girl prior to an initiation ceremony presenting an offering.

Master El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura

Figure of young initiate

Figure of young initiate

Figure of young initiate

Master El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura

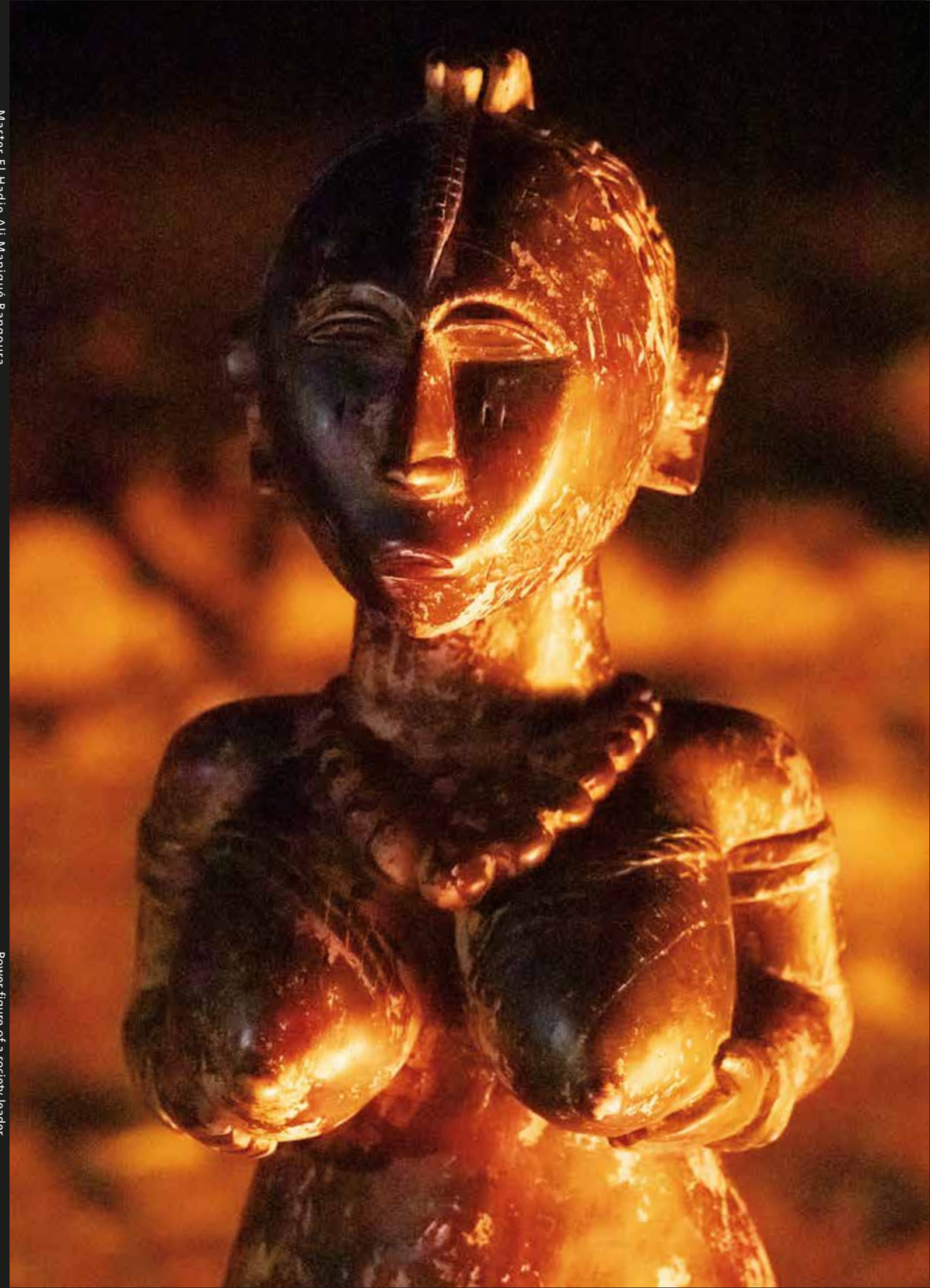
4 **Power figure of a society leader**

El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura
Elder figure of the *A-tekan* women's society

Baga people, Katako, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1932
Teak
95x27x30

The power of this figure is underscored by its small size. Her head bears a Nimba face and she supports her breasts in a position of power.

Master El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura



Power figure of a society leader

Power figure of a society leader

Master El Hadje Ali Manigué Bangoura

Power figure of a society leader

Don’t Place Your Blame onto Others

If you find yourself
In someplace odd,
Don’t blame it on
The path you plod.

Instead, admit
“I didn’t take care”
For to place blame on others
Just isn’t quite fair.

Even a Golden Boy Has an Iron Mind

When teaching your child,
You mustn’t waste time.
For even the golden boy
Can have an iron mind.

All parents must know
To dedicate their days
To shaping their child’s
Skills, habits, and ways.

BAGA COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

Illustration: M. Weiss

1 **Divination figure**
(Tshol – Elek)

Baga people, The Republic of Guinea
Circa 1880
Wood
104x86x42

This Tshol resided in a dedicated hut deep in the sacred forest and was responsible for the well-being of several villages, that it visited in a form of a headdress. During the rainy season it retreated to the care of an elder. .

Up: **Headdress**
Labouret Collection,
Museum de Toulouse,
H. 32 cm.
Photo: Frederic Ripell.

2

Male initiation snake headdress (Bansonyl)

Baga people, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1963
Wood and paint
170x24

When dancing, this snake headdress evokes and calls up the *Mantso na Tshol*, a powerful and dangerous entity, known for its ability to detect and protect against sorcery.

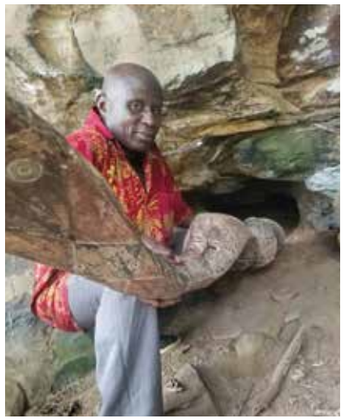
3 **Snake forest spirit divination figure (A mantsho na Tshol)**

Baga people, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1944
Wood and paint
170x24

This figure served as the guardian of the Kanfarande and Binari villages in Guinea's Boke prefecture.

Above: Restoration works headed by master Sidime, Conakry Guinea, August 2021, Conakry, Republic of Guinea. Photo: Abou Kouroma.

A mantsho na Tshol, Contemporary divination figure, July 2021, Taigbe, Kamala, Republic of Guinea. Photo: Abou Kouroma.



4

Headdress – box mask (Sibondel)

Baga people, The Republic of Guinea
Mid-twentieth century
Wood and paint
117x63x59

These were used during the sixties by the youth association (symbolized by the hare) in celebrations honoring government delegates.

Left: Attributed by F. lamp to Koumbassa. National Museum of African Art, Eliot Elifsofon Photographic archive Photo: Frederic Lamp. Published in *Art of the Baga*, p.232.

5 **Headdress – box mask (Sibondel)**

Baga people, The Republic of Guinea
Mid-twentieth century
Wood and paint
117x63x59

A box used in the seventies honoring Baga football tournaments.

6

Nimba headdress
(D'imba – in Susu)

Baga people, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1942
Teak Wood
42x31x20

This Headdress depicted on a 5000 Guinea Frank note (lower right), regarded as an omen of prosperity, painted on makeshift billboards and walls. Due to it's relative small size and fragility nearly none survived.

Right: Baga dancer, illustrated by Nkai Sidime, and 5000 Guinea Frank note.

לאלכס תיקון
רקע

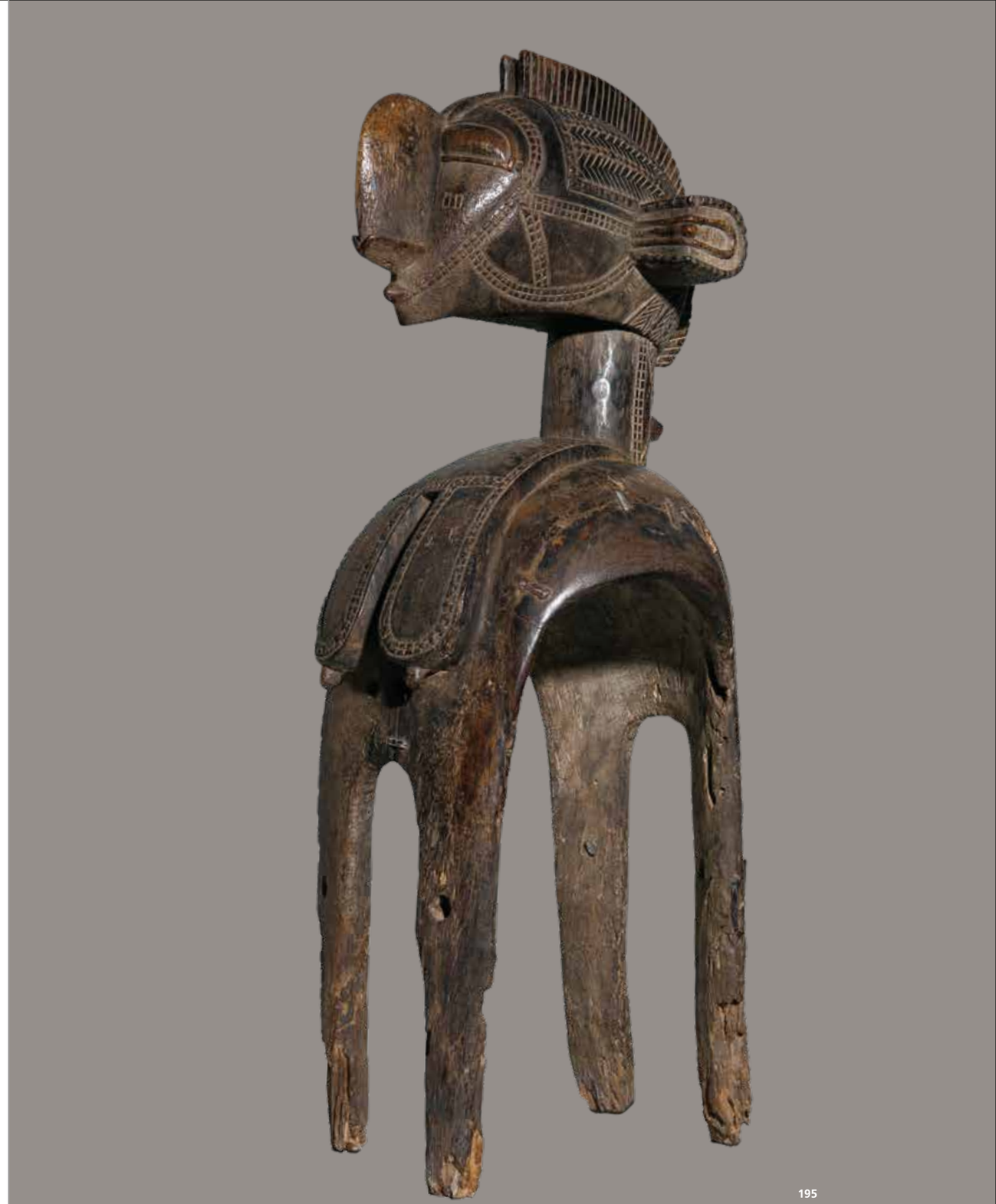
7

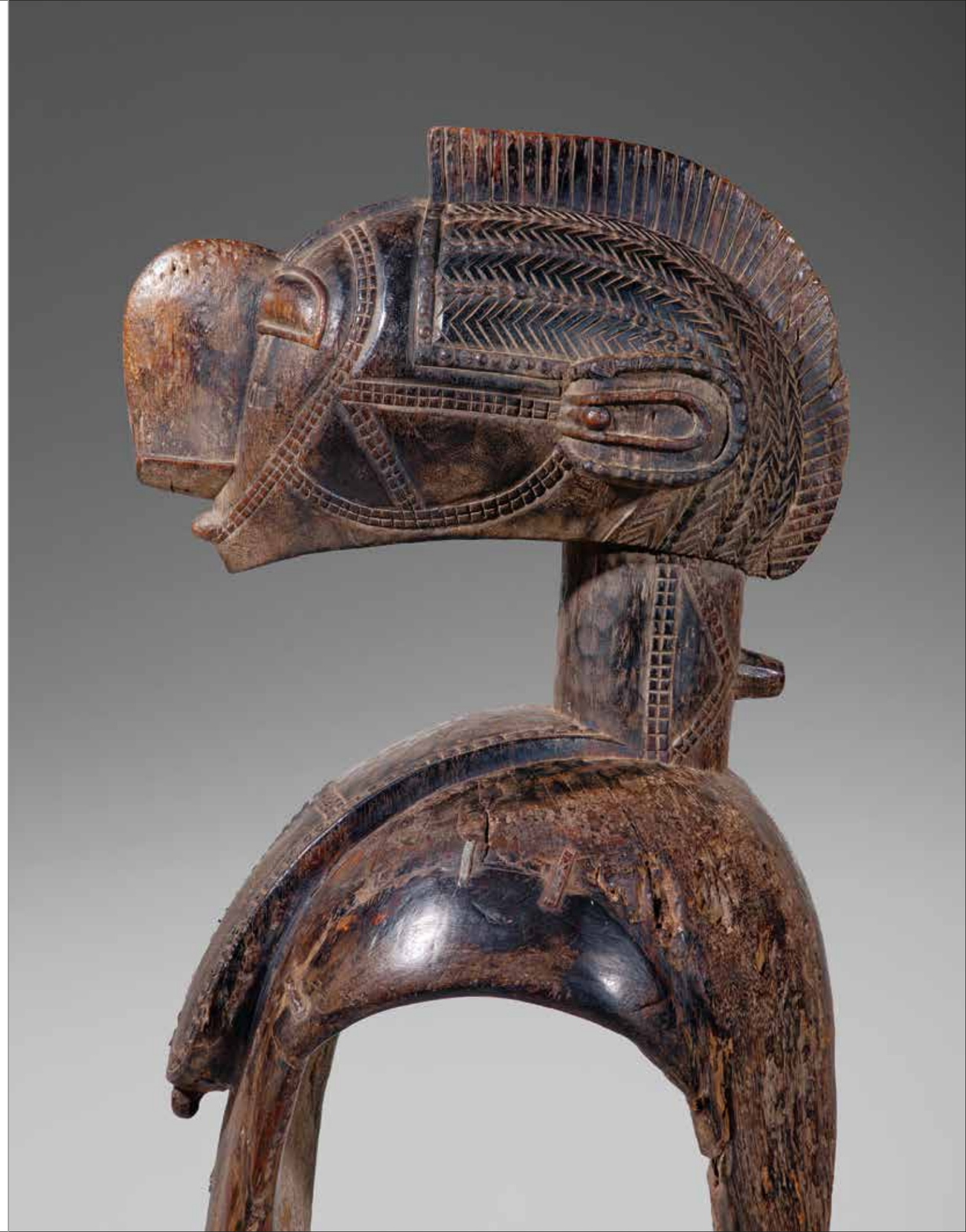
Nimba headdress
(D'imba – in Susu)

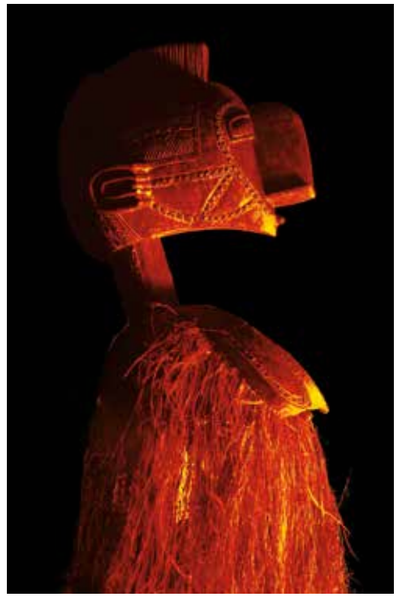
Baga people, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1935
Teak
111x43x35

Nimba (*d'mba*, in Susu)
De, a small baby, *Ba*, My mother
The son and the mother.
A representation of an abstract
goodness and benevolence.

Right: The new brand identity of
Republic of Guinea, AETOSWire.







8

Nimba headdress
(D'imba – in Susu)

Baga people, The Republic of Guinea
Circa 1967
Teak
128x58x44

A figure of spiritual power an image of a great mother who has given birth to many children. An ideal of the female role in Baga society.

9

Shoulder mask
(Zigiren Wonde)

Baga people, The Republic of Guinea
Circa 1930
Wood, pigment,metal
102x36x28

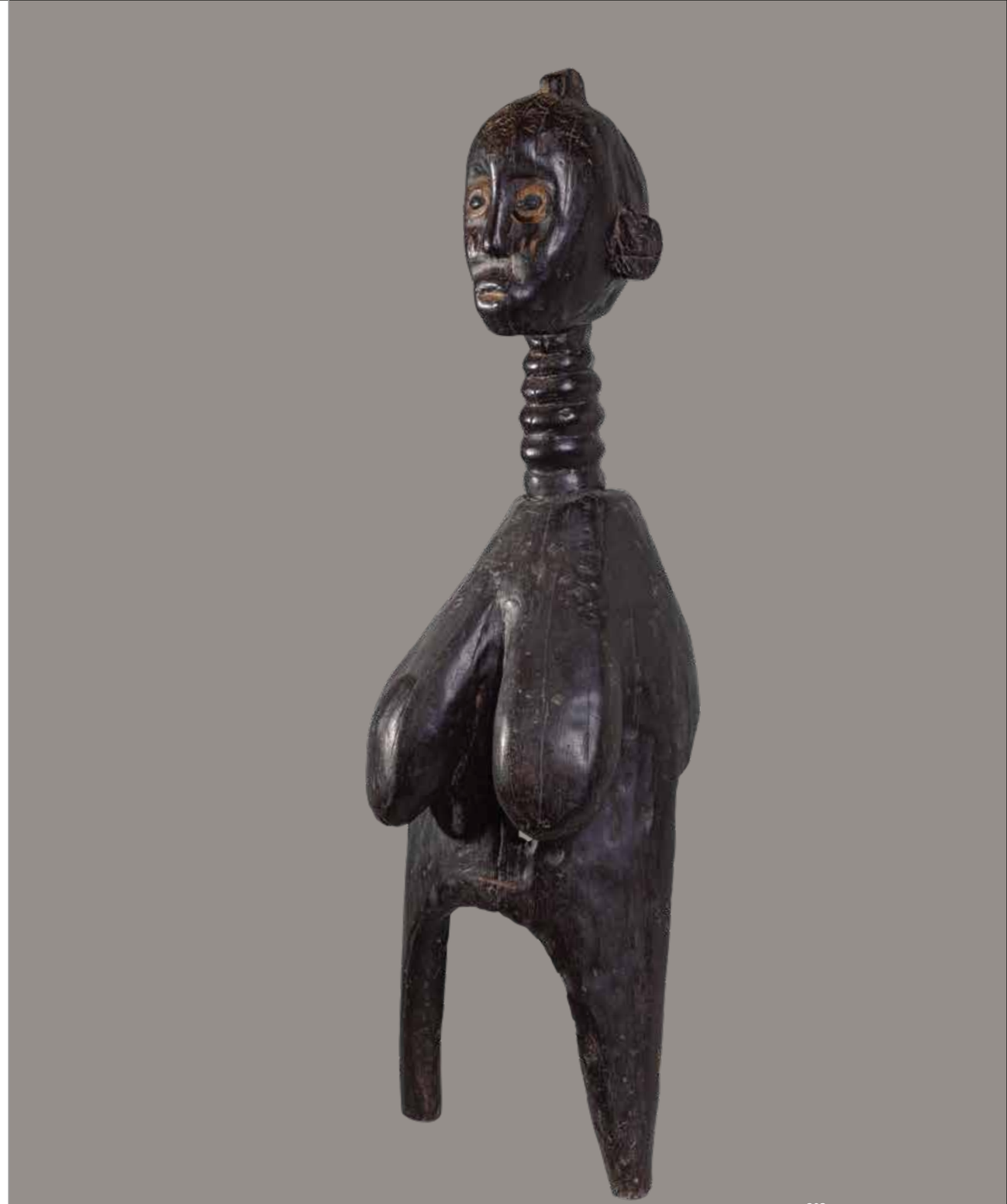
A shoulder mask used to accompany a bride while being carried on the shoulders of young men to her new home.

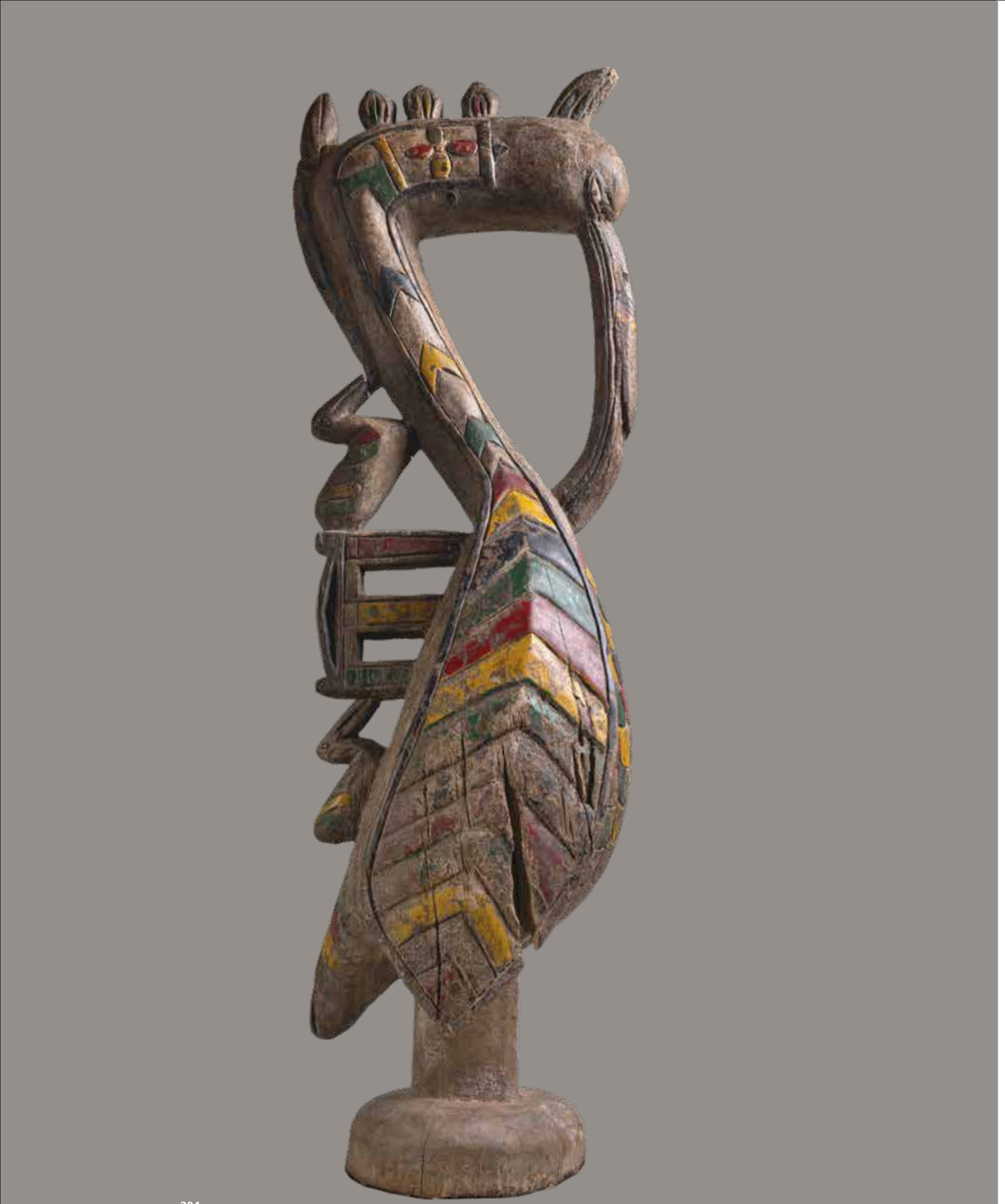
10

Shoulder mask
(Zigiren Wonde)

Baga people, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1926
Wood, pigment,metal
100x34x27

A shoulder mask used to accompany a bride while being carried on the shoulders of young men to her new home.





11

Headdress featuring the Goliath heron (A Bamp)

Baga people, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1947
Wood, polychrom
117x30x37

Left: Heron Dictioaire Universel d'Histoire Naturelle D'Orbigny, Charles, 1841.

12

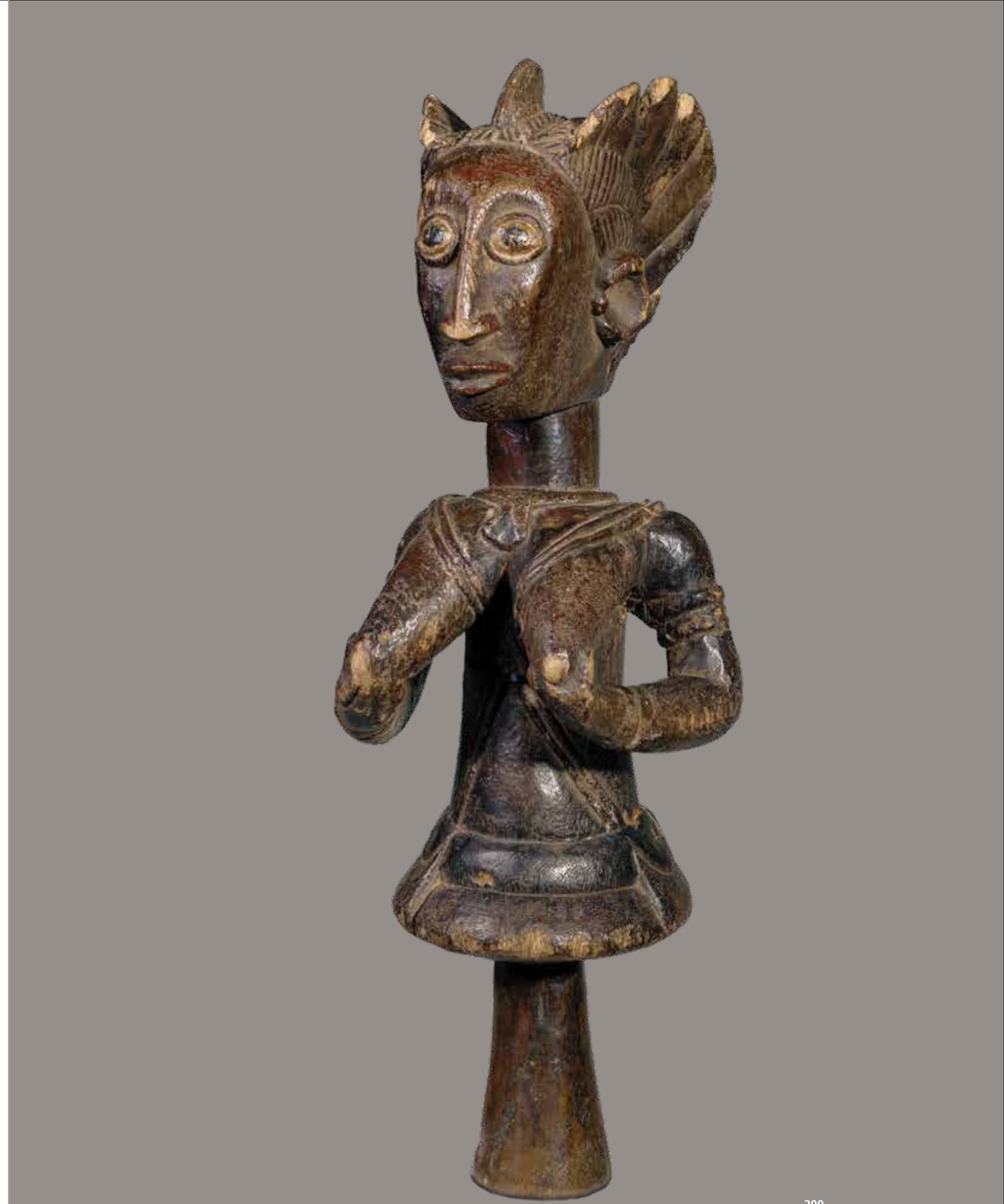
Bird headdress with three figures and two birds on the back (A Bamp)

Baga people, The Republic of Guinea
Circa 1947
Wood, polychrom
117x30x37

Musee' du Quai Barnly, Publication poster for the L'afriqe des Routes exhibition January 2017 – November 2017, featuring similar headdress from their collection (1963.153)-1931.

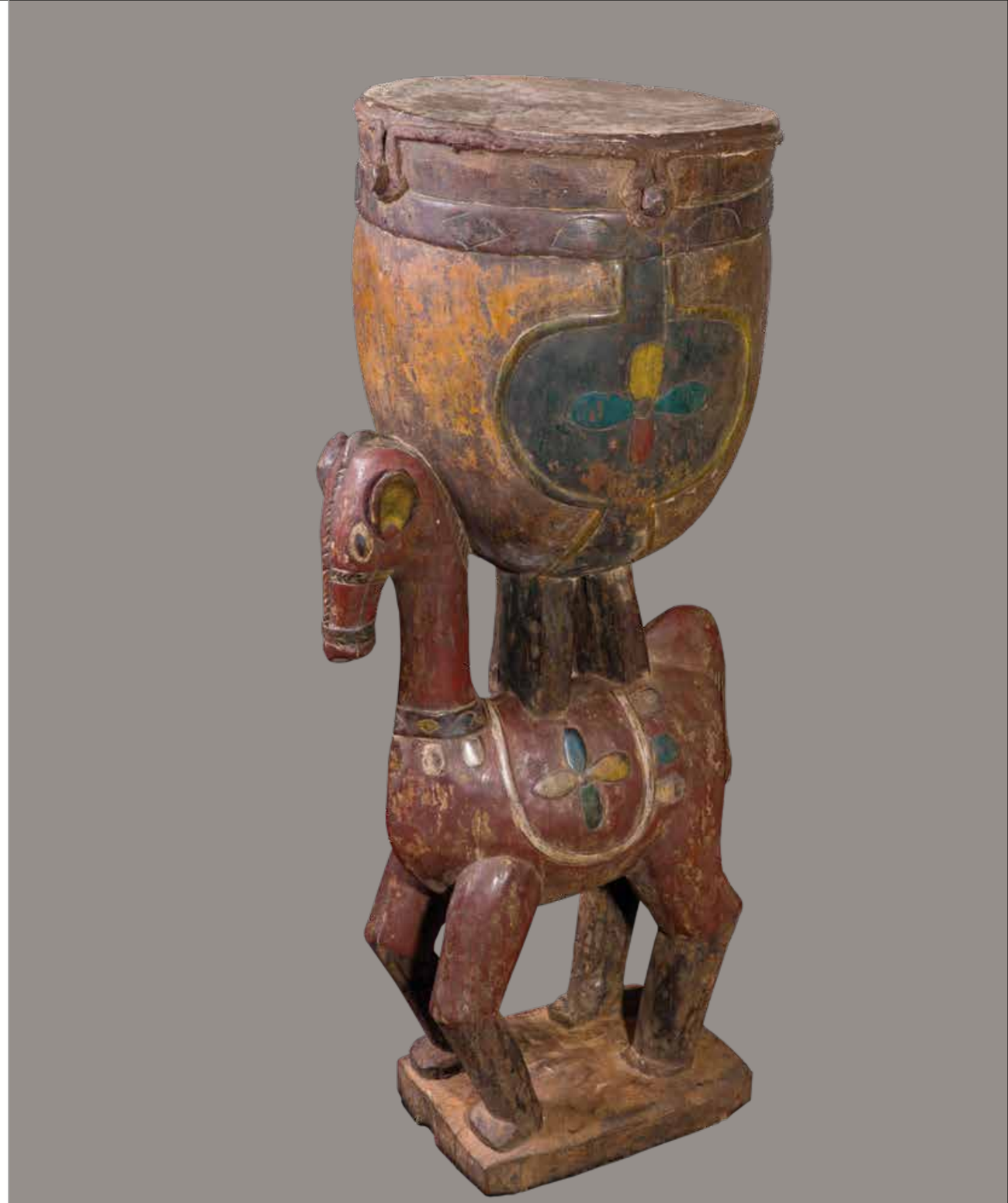
13 **Staff of women's association elder (Yonbofissa)**

Baga people, The Republic of Guinea
Circa 1947
Wood, pigment
51x17x20



14 **Male initiation drum (Timba)**

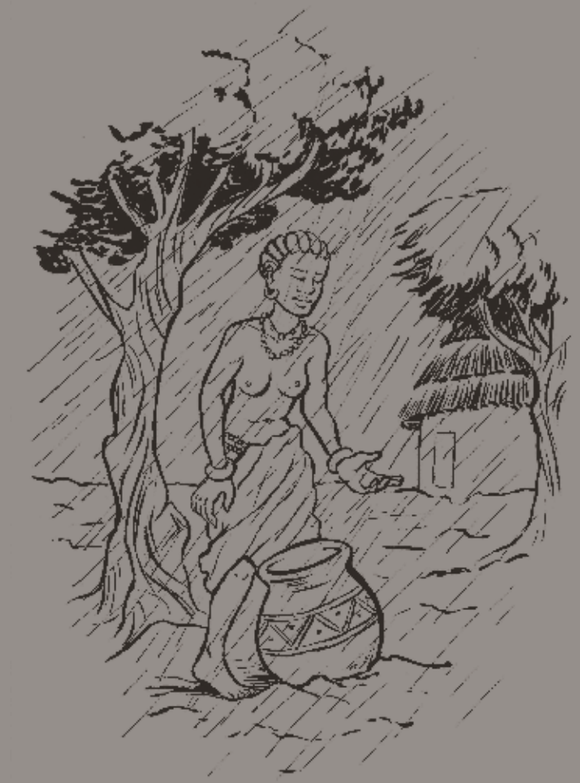
Baga people, The Republic of Guinea
Circa 1944
Wood, animal skin, paint
102x36x36



15 **Nimba dancing mask**

Baga people, Republic of Guinea
Circa 1942
Wood, pigment
47x32x18

A Nimba mask, adorned with two hornbills,
the Baga's totemic animal.



Crying in the Rain

We aren't always able to see
When someone else is suffering.

For when you're crying in the rain
your face is too wet to see another's pain.

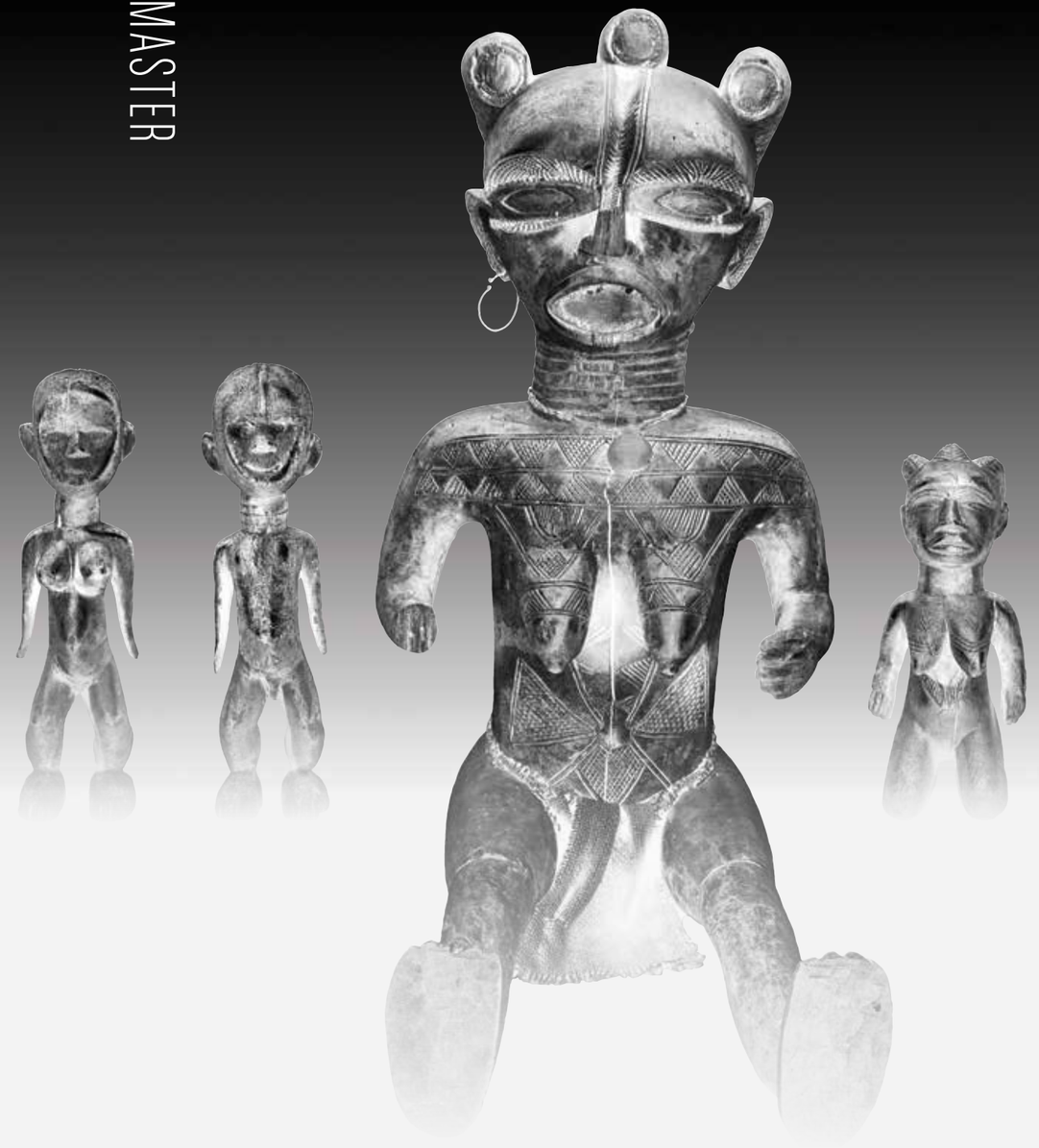
And often, the hurt is trapped inside
Of he who hurts in silent cries.

Old Pots Have the Taste of Ages

The old kitchen pots
Will make very fine foods
For the old pots absorb spices
That make meals taste good.

Trust in the old
Instead of the new
For tastier food
And heartier stews.

BASSA MASTER



Gender Palm Oil and the "Lady Bassa"

Secret societies

In the rural regions of the Guinea coast, survival demanded a heavy reliance on communal institutions. Life developed within a dynamic, albeit hierarchical, social order. Advancement within it was constrained by one's lineage, to which one was indebted either by birth, marriage, or as a permanent guest.

Sande society, "Bundu Girls," 1914. Photo: Alphonso Lisk-Carew.

A prerequisite for membership in the community was initiation by the age of puberty to one of the Guinea coast's two principal secret societies: *Poro* for the men, and *Sande* for the women. Both societies regulated all aspects of life from birth to death, enabling a young man or woman to find their place in the society and maintain a balance within the elaborate duality and fluidity of the hierarchical social order; .

Sande Girl, Grand Bassa County, Liberia, 1997.
Photo: Monia Sturges.

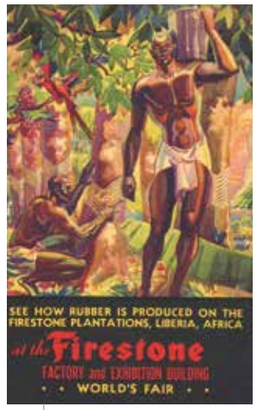
Sande school, "Bundu Devil," Sierra Leone, 1915.
Photo: Beatty k.j.

Even today, *Sande*, which is reported to have over three million members, encompasses most aspects of the life of women in the rural population of the Guinea coast. In the 1985 national census of

Girls attending Bundu school, Grand Bassa County, Liberia, 1997. Photo: Monia Sturges.

Liberia, the concept of a woman's society was recognized as "*mawaee*," that is, those who eat together from the same pot. Thus, the existence of semi-independent family units consisting solely of women and children was formalized.
The secret societies are organized according to localized tribal chapters. While they recognized the hierarchy and power symbols of their neighbors, there is no evidence of structural pan-tribal leadership having ever emerged.
Although *Sande* can be dated back as early as the fifteenth century, the society's actual practices and liturgy remain largely unknown. The oath of secrecy taken by its initiates is closely guarded and initiation is regarded as a great privilege. Research on *Sande* is also limited, since it was primarily the *Poro* that attracted the interest of twentieth century anthropologists.

Bassa mask worn as a headdress, Liberia, 1970s.
Photo: Mario Meneghini.



Firestone plantation, exhibition poster, Liberia, 1930.

Quelling the hinterland

At the time this monumental Bassa maternity figure was crafted, in the 1920s, the Christian Americo-Liberian government in Monrovia, led by its president Charles King, was enjoying a positive cash flow. This was due, in part, to its famous agreement with the Firestone rubber company. From this position of relative strength, the government was able to use its resources to consolidate control over the Liberian hinterland.

Indigenous kissi money, Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art.
Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

The History of the Liberian Frontier Force, Naval and Miltary Press, Haywood & Clarke, 2015.

The Liberian government systematically impoverished the rural areas under its control, By rendering the local populations' iron-rod-based currency system obsolete and forcibly imposing a new Hut tax, payable only in international hard currency, the government virtually devastated the wealth of the elders and the community overnight. The Monrovia regime also outlawed the indigenous secret male societies of the Guinea coast, imprisoning their elders and suspending the all-powerful *Poro*. Liberian officials disregarded human rights violations committed against the rural population, branding the leaders of these once proud societies as cannibals or members of

Imprisoned Poro elders, Tribes of the Liberian hinterland.
G. Schwab, published 1947.

the notorious Tiger association. The persecutions stripped the villages of their male population thus inducing poverty and hunger.

Revolving door in gender-related roles

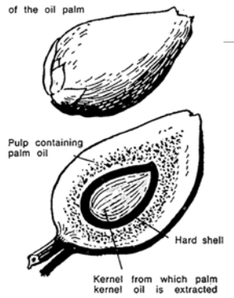
During this painful period, women inevitably had to assume a more active role in their communities, filling in for the males as both breadwinners and keepers of tradition, leading their *Sande* society to assume greater power and importance.

The main cash crop of the region, the oil palm fruit, was processed by working teams of women overseen by *Sande* "big women." While the plantation owners kept the more desirable oil extracted from the pulp of the palm fruit, the women's organization received the oil of the fruit kernel in lieu of payment.

Oil palm fruit.

Palm fruit (pulp and kernel), from which oil is extracted.
Photo: Unknown Photographer.

This oil became especially important in the early twentieth century. Historically beef fat was the main type of fat used for margarine production. But shortly after the turn of the century, a lack of beef fat coupled with new techniques for



Palm fruit krenel.

Oil production, West Africa, Grand Bassa County, 2011. Photo: Peenak.

1920s Blue Band advertisement, *Grace's Guide To British Industrial History*.

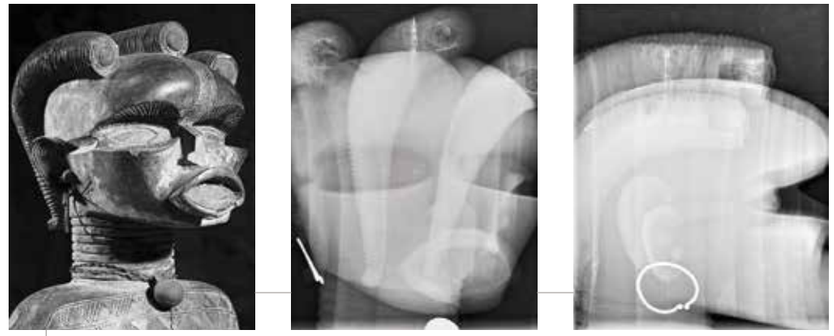
hydrogenating plant materials made the use of vegetable oils in the formulation of margarine not only possible, but also far more efficient economically. Between 1900 and 1920, margarine began being manufactured from a mixture of animal fats and vegetable oils, such as the palm kernel oil. A key ingredient of margarine and soap, palm kernel oil, now became a sought-after commodity fetching high prices on the international markets. Traditionally, men had been responsible for selling the crops to city merchants, who then sold it on the international market, keeping most of the profits for themselves.

Following the men's express refusal to be exploited or to sell crops to merchants at such low prices, they were persecuted and jailed, leading The *Sande* to take over the direct commerce, thereby gaining sudden access to somewhat considerable wealth and power. This new status was expressed in elaborate rituals and liturgical paraphernalia that enhanced reality by increasing the proportions of the body images. The sheer size of this female Bassa ritual figure, quadruple that of similar figures from other periods, may reflect the sudden but brief change in the socioeconomic status of *Sande* society.

Sande Mask, collection of Charles Miller The Third.

The Bassa Lady

Exactly how this figure participated in the power shift from *Poro* to *Sande*, male to female, can only be speculated about. Its sheer enormity and sculptural complexity, however, suggests a structured, secret indoor liturgy, every aspect of which was meticulously orchestrated.

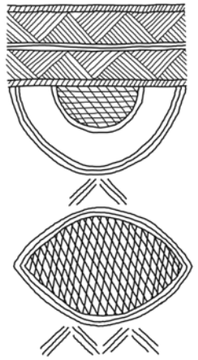


M.R.I., Assaf Harofeh Medical Center Radiology labs, Israel.

Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art. h. 86.5 cm. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb. Kerchache Collection, h. 44.4 cm. Photo: Unknown Photographer.

Unlike masks and other figures that were celebrated during a carefully choreographed performance, the drama in this case was probably achieved through conceived illumination and sound effects, bringing the static figure to life through a play of light, shadow, and music.

The three cornucopia-like horns comprising the figure's coiffure sealed and filled with a potent "medicine" meant to activate a protective zone around the *Sande* society house in which it was located. Such horns were a common motif in *Sande* iconography and appear in other Bondo masks.



Scarification engraved in the Bassa figure back.
Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art.
Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

"Gani Ceremony" W. C. Siegmann, 1980, Indiana University, Photo Archive.

The figure represents a *Sande* elder seated in a position taught during the training period at the "bush school." Mastering it is one of the prerequisites of obtaining membership in the society, a young women must be able sit in this position during the "Gani ceremony," a coming-out ceremony which follows an initial period of seclusion, during which the young initiates sits outside the *Sande* enclosure in stony silence with downcast eyes, "deaf" to the calls and praise heaped upon them by relatives who pretend that they cannot find the daughters or sisters they have entrusted to the *Sande* elders.

Girl laboring in the Bundu school, Grand Bassa county, Liberia, 1997. Photo: Monia Sturges.

The complex scarified engravings on the figure's back can be read from top to bottom, signifying east to west. Their pattern mirrors the route into the *Sande* house, where initiates live for a year during the initiation process. The pattern begins with a cluster of triangles symbolizing cultivated fields – the women's sphere of birth and fertility. Next comes a section of an oil palm fruit representing the *Sande* house, which is set apart by a zigzag line referring to the nearby river that isolates the village and everyday life which are depicted as a palm kernel, and at the bottom – the West – followed by the primeval wood, *Poro*, and death.

Hebrew University archeological labs, 2016. Photo: M. Weiss.


Amadou Diaw, Antiquaire au quartier Almamyah

« Nous avons des arts anciens qui datent de plus de deux cent ans et qui gardent encore leur forme primitive »

WEEK-END INFO - N°004 DU 19 DECEMBRE - 2014

Publication at *Weekend Info* Guinea, Conakry, 2014.

Such patterns etched in kaolin chalk are still applied daily onto the bodies of young Bassa *Sande* initiates. The clay serves as a protective shell, physically beautifying the skin, eliminating its flaws, and designating the girls as forbidden to men. Girls in this liminal state are considered especially seductive; still virgins, they have already undergone female circumcision and are therefore ready for sexual activity. The application of white clay signifies the departure of black people from the natural world and their entry into that of the dead – a world of white, invisible spirits.

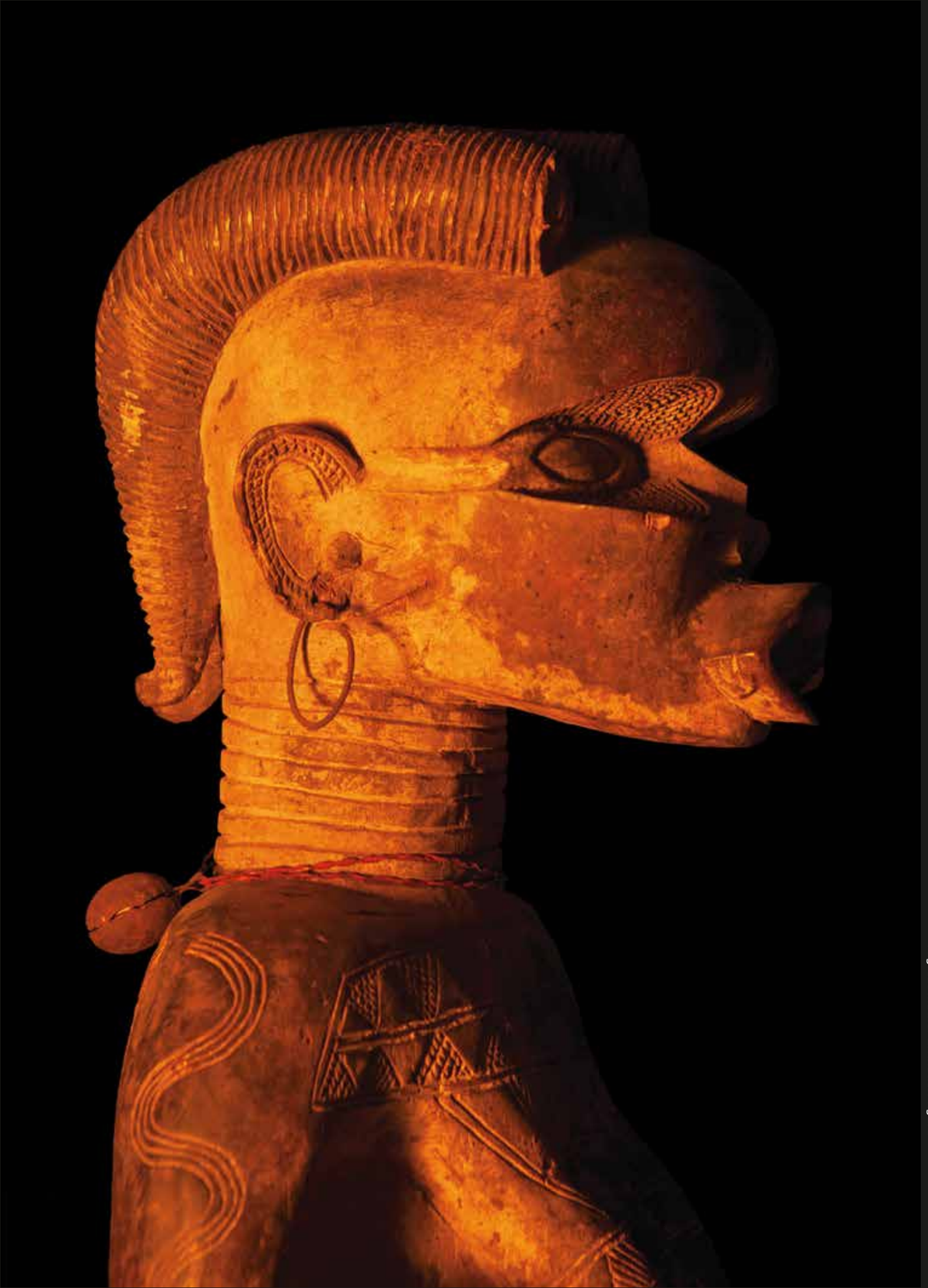
Due to the mayhem of the Liberian civil wars in the early 1990s, a Bassa community near Buchanan fled to neighboring Guinea, where it sold this maternity figure to Mr. Amadou Diaw, a renowned antiques dealer in Conakry. For nearly fifteen years, Mr. Diaw kept and cherished the statue as his most prized possession. In 2010, he passed it on to the author in a sale reported in the local press. In 2015 haunted by the memory of the figure, Mr. Diaw commissioned a full-scale copy of it based on photographs. Even this failed to console Mr. Diaw, who, driven into madness by the sale of the statue, became a recluse, sadly dying in 2020.

The statue has been dated to 1925 based on a chemical analysis conducted with Infrared Spectroscopy technique at a renowned Swiss laboratory. The MRI revealed that the organic "medicine" activating the figure is still intact.

1 **A great mother divination figure**

Bassa people, Grand Bassa County, Liberia
Circa 1925
Wood, kaolin, metal, organic material
86x47x74

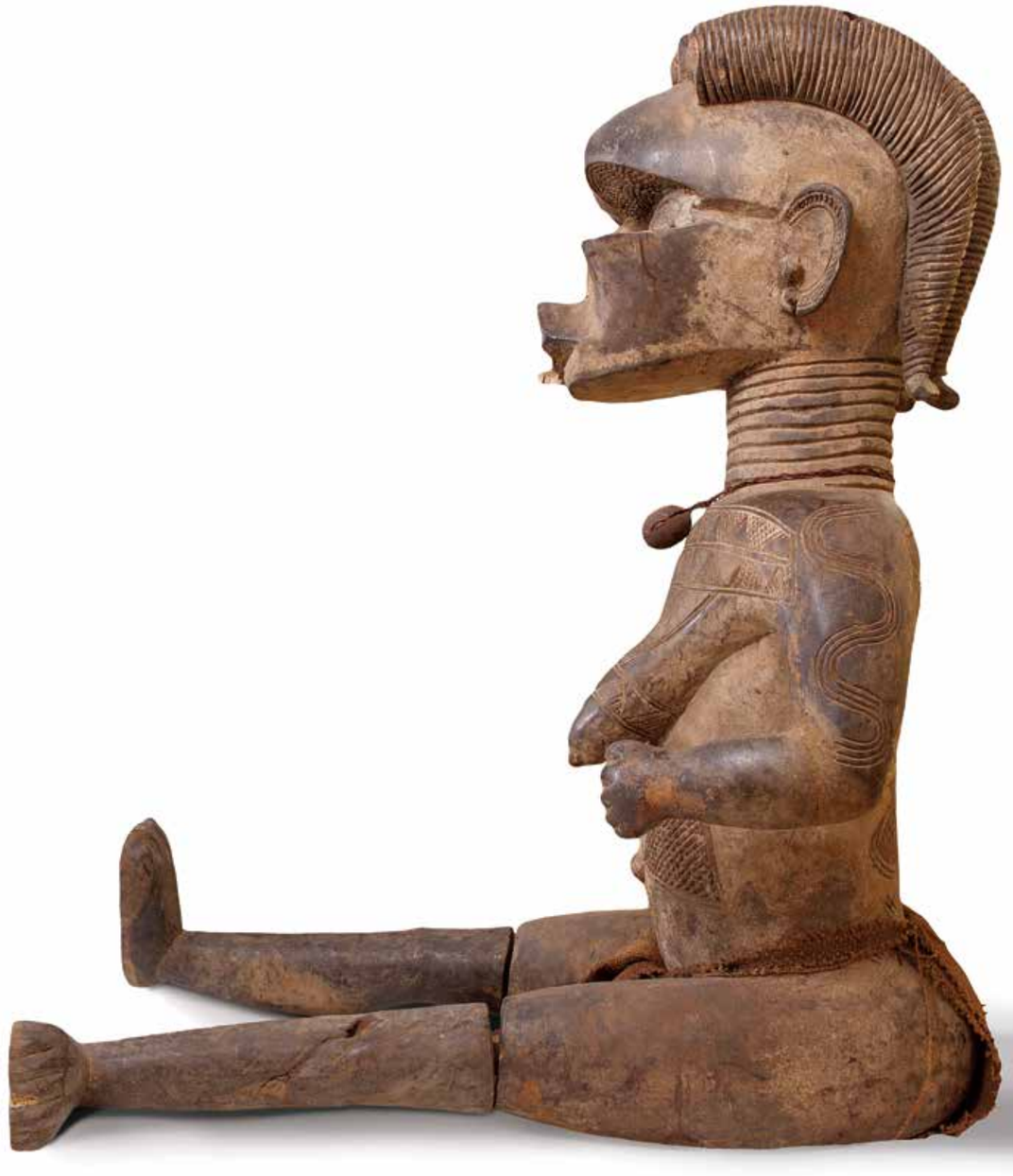
A unique Bassa great mother divination figure her size is four times that of other known Bassa statues, her horn shaped curls are filled with organic magic materials and her body is decorated with typical Bassa scarification and kaolin.
Such a figure would reside in the women's society house never seen by male members. It would protect the community and the new initiates.



A great mother divination figure

Bassa Master

A great mother divination figure



A great mother divination figure

2

Entertainment headdress mask (Gela)

Bassa people, Liberia
Circa 1940
Wood
27x16x9

A Bassa headdress, worn diagonally clad to a dancer cane hat during performance.

3

A pre-initiation boy's divination figure

Bassa people, Liberia
Circa 1950
Wood
43x12x14

Private divination figure. Intended for the well-being of a pre initiation boy, a rarity in the Guinean woods community.

4 **Ancestral mother divination figure**

Bassa people, Liberia
Circa 1950
Wood
45x14x14

Used for personal divination in order
to invoke the ancestors.

5 **Ancestral mother divination figure**

Bassa people, Liberia
Circa 1942
Wood
49x15x16

Ancestors divination figures represented those who were moral beacons to the society, and are setting an example by worshiping them one is taking an oath to follow their path.

Bassa Master

Ancestral mother divination figure

6

Mother figure, Dan
(Lo Me)

Dan people, Liberia, Ivory Coast

Circa 1950
Wood
45x14x14

Lo me, (wood/person).
An idealized mother, eyes cast downwards, she is portrayed with full breasts and carrying a child attesting to her fertility.
Such idols were commissioned by powerful personages, exhibited with great fanfare, and then kept private.

Mother figure

Bassa Master

Mother figure

לאלכס תיקון
רקע

לאלכס תיקון
רקע

7 **Male youth pre-initiation figure, Dan**

Dan people, Liberia, Ivory Coast

Circa 1945
Wood
44x13x9

Male youth pre-initiation figure

Bassa Master

Male youth pre-initiation figure

Bassa Master

Female youth pre-initiation figure

8

Female youth pre-initiation figure, Dan

Dan people, Liberia, Ivory Coast

Circa 1945
Wood
44x14x9

Female youth pre-initiation figure

לאלכס
תיקון רקע

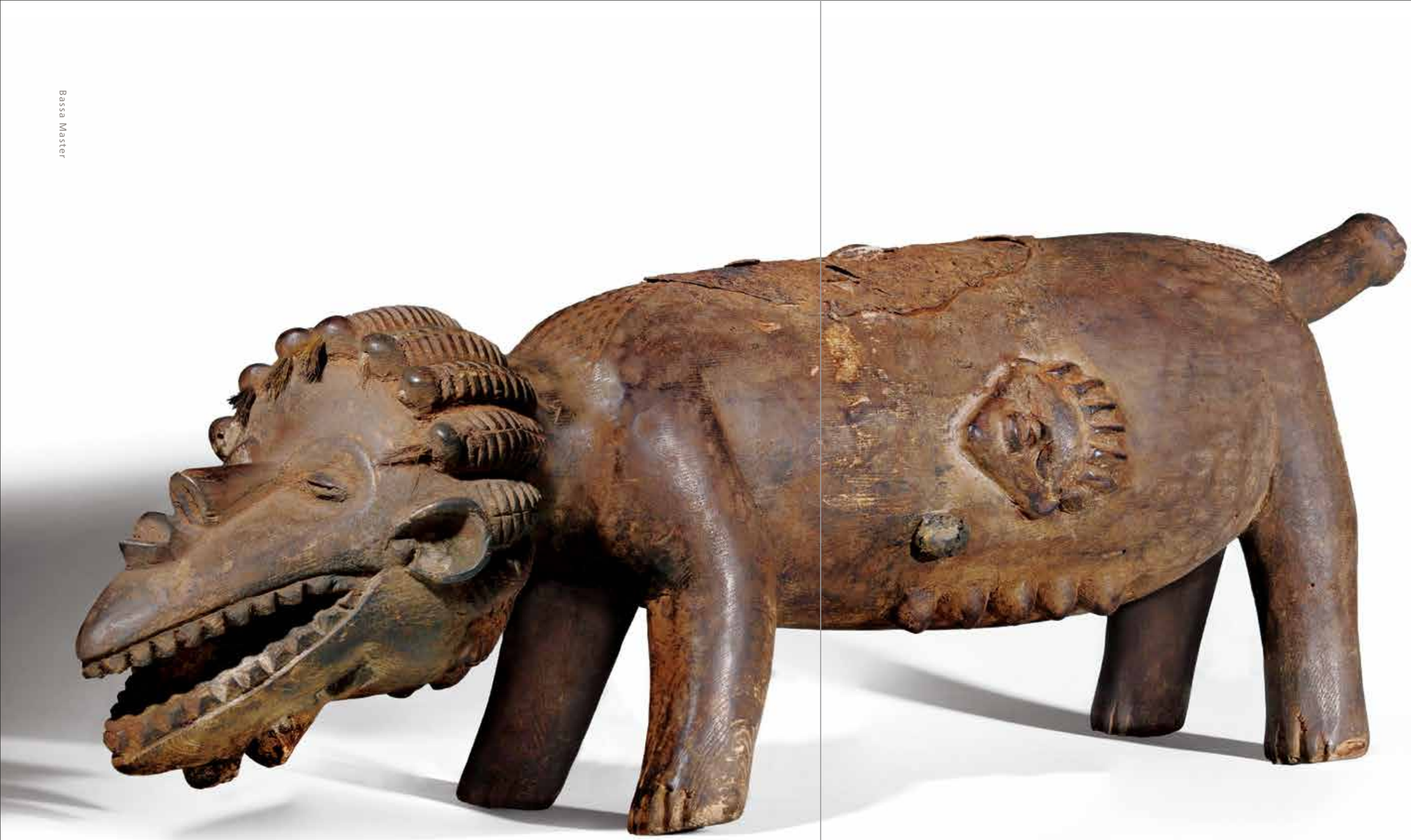
9 **A hybrid mammal divination figure**

Bassa people, Liberia
Circa 1940
Wood, metal, organic materials
76x25x14

Forest hog divination statue. *Potamochoerus Larvatus*, its head is portrayed in a collage of the Ge Nao masks, and its body is decorated with Bassa talismans. A sealed metal cavity contains organic magic materials.

Left: Bushpig Potamochoerus Larvatus.
A.H.W. Seydack.

דוריאן תיקון
צל
ואח"כ לאלכס
תיקון רקע



A hybrid mammal divination figure

If You Spit on the Heavens,

Your Face Will Get Wet

He who curses God
Who blames and who spits
Invites the world's evil
To come back to him.

If you send evil
Up onto God,
It falls right back on you
With barely a nod.

When Others Wash Your Back,

Wash Your Belly

When your friend comes to wash your back
Take charge to direct the water's track.

Send the water's cleansing flow
from your back to your neck, your stomach, your nose.

The help you receive from a good friend
Will help you finish your task to the end.
And it's your job to finish the task
Make use of the help so your cleanliness lasts.

GREBO COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

Sapo Reserve and the Grebo Oracle

Grebo Mask, 1954, Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art.
Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

Foot bracelet, *Tribes of the Liberian Hinterland*, G. Schwab, (published 1947).

A "Kru Ring," Liberian studies forum.

The masks of different groups populating the Guinean rain forest outdo each other in their quest for beauty and their aspiration to portray the metaphysical. Still, those made by the Grebo people are particularly outstanding, notable for their intense gaze, peering out at all the realms – the tangible and the intangible – through multiple pairs of eyes, their power and attraction enhanced with each encounter.
Listening closely, one hears their story, a tale of a people striving to preserve their independence and culture in the face of Western influences, oblivious to their image in the outside world.

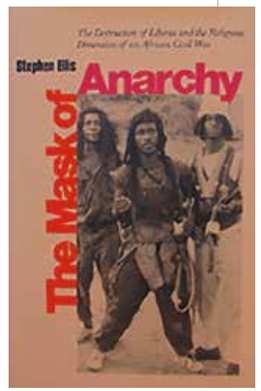
The Grebo, numbering about 400,000, live along Liberia's coastal plain. Their villages are found mainly on the dunes located between the Atlantic Ocean coast and freshwater lagoons surrounded by swamps. The many rivers zigzagging the coastal Liberian plain make travel extremely difficult. Even reaching a village as close as the crow flies to the capital Monrovia can take several days of arduous travel.

In Liberia, the Grebo are viewed as a separatist group – fearsome warriors jealously preserving their traditions, including human sacrifice. Their villages are considered off limits to all; those valuing their lives are advised to keep their distance.

The *Wikipedia* entry for Grebo includes a detailed description of ankle bracelets their leaders once wore, metal bracelets which could not be removed and had to be "fed" frequently with human blood.

Decorative teeth chiseling, Wikipedia.

The Mask of Anarchy, Stephen Alis, Hurst & Co.,1999.



It also notes their tradition of sharpening their front teeth, leaving it to the reader to draw the obvious conclusion that this is a tribe of ferocious cannibals. This impression is substantiated in images from the Liberian Civil War (1989–2003), such as the former Liberian president Samuel Doe, executed and tortured on a live television broadcast, and Joshua Blahyi, a.k.a. "General Butt Naked," and his "child soldiers" running completely naked and massacring civilians.
In the 1970s and 1980s, the Liberian press published numerous articles about children being kidnapped and ritually murdered. Richard Harris' canonical book *The Mask of Anarchy* explores the roots of the endemic violence along the Liberian coast and emphasizes the role of indigenous culture in the carnage.

Grebo Warriors, *Tribes of the Liberian Hinterland*, G. Schwab, (published 1947).

African Leopard man, Liberian history and culture forum.

The Grebo warriors, armed with curved knives, were pictured in the early 1940s in Schwab's book *Tribes of the Liberian Hinterland*. They were also photographed in 1971 dancing at the funeral of President Tubman, who, although of American-Liberian descent, was viewed as a Grebo leader.

A ‘fully attired’, Grebo warrior, G. Schwab.

Be my King, L. Cave, 1928 movie.

These graphic images reinforced those of cannibal savages already embedded in the Western imagination by colonial propaganda campaigns.

Kru sailor, 1888, warfare history blog, B. Spark.

This differs drastically from the portrayal of the Grebo in the neighboring Ivory Coast, where 10% of this ethnic group still resides. There they are called kru (not to be confused with the Kru of Liberia, a distinct ethnic group). Even the name kru has quite a different connotation. Some say that Kru is an abbreviation of *krumen* (crewmen), who performed essential services as crew members in the colonial fleets sailing off the West African coast starting in the early eighteenth century.

The Grebo were a skilled labor force, willing to work for hire. Over time, they became the primary intermediaries between Western trading companies and the coast, mainly due to the colonials’ inability to withstand the harsh subtropical climate. In order to distinguish themselves from the millions of their fellow Africans who were kidnapped and sold into

Grebo mask, Sotheby’s Standoff Collection, lot 19. Photo: ???????

Yves Klein, photo: C. Vlip/ Bpk-Berlin, and Reckitt Blue, *Wikipedia*.

Palm trade, Library of the South African Parliament.

slavery, the Grebo marked their foreheads with indigo blue, a tradition that continued through the early twentieth century. They produced this shade of ultramarine 100 years before Yves Klein patented it, mixing clay and soil with the Reckitt’s Blue detergent, which had been available on the Guinea coast since the eighteenth century. This mark became one of the essentials in the Grebo credo, expressing their status as free people, a group never enslaved.

The reasons for their “safety net” were primarily economic. Until the mid-eighteenth century, the Guinean coastal region was sparsely populated. Slaving expeditions captured approximately 2,000 people each year. With a high mortality rate of about 60%, this yielded a total of some 800 unskilled slaves annually. During the nineteenth century, the colonial powers used a labor force estimated at between 5,000 to 10,000 people every year. The fact that Dr. Livingstone’s expedition included some Grebo people attests to the impressive success of the Liberian work crews. Following the abolition of slavery, the boundary between slaves and hired free laborers became blurred, particularly among Western employers. This was well demonstrated in the *Regina Coelli* incident, in which a group of Liberian laborers who had been brought onto the French navy ship mutinied, killing the crew and setting the ship on fire.

Throughout the nineteen and early twentie centuries, the economy along the Liberian coast was based mainly on trade in palm products (oil

and wood) as well as hired labor. With few natural harbors, ships would draw close to the river mouths and locals would row out to them to trade and seek employment. A crew was usually hired for two-year stints. Upon completing their journeys, ships would drop off the hired crew wherever they last docked, sometimes far from their starting point. Along their journey home, the Grebo traded the goods in which they were paid. As the economy strengthened, the coastal strip became more densely populated, and the sites in which the Grebo/Kru traded with Western shippers evolved into port cities.

Kru Men and their Canoes, blog by Martin Jobs, 2019.

Kru sailors, Liberian history forum. Photo: Unknown Photographer.

Starting in 1820, the British began to employ "headmen" as intermediaries to organize the recruitment of laborers and to negotiate wages. These headmen received a commission from both the employers and the hired laborers.

A brief review of Liberia's history can help to explain this vast difference in the representation of the Grebo in Liberia and the bordering Ivory Coast.

Colony of Liberia, 1822, *Wikipedia*.

Liberia was founded by American organizations whose mission was to repatriate freed slaves from America to the African continent. However, the freed slaves were given no training nor any tools prior their "relocation," and were actually being deported to an inhospitable shore. The first shiploads of ex-slaves were settled near Grebo villages. It was hoped that there would be harmony between the new settlers and the locals, even though they had nothing in common apart from skin color.

Did African Americans Enslave Liberian African, Published by S. Snapp, 2019. Photo: Unknown Photographer.

Due to the endemic malaria and the high mortality rate, it was a West African tradition to view nomadic groups as a source of manpower. Established households would welcome new members into their community, who in turn accepted their hosts' political hierarchy and the full set of obligations and conditions for living in their proximity.

The settlers were completely foreign to that culture, ethnically and religiously. In 1857, the "Republic of Maryland" was annexed to the territory of Liberia, but the local indigenous population was naturally excluded from it. The settlers' livelihood was based on their exclusive trading rights with the colonial powers and with the related economy. The young republic supported itself by levying heavy taxes on trade between the interior and the coast, including a head tax on any laborer boarding a ship.

Liberian military bombards Grebo positions, 1910, Historical Preservation Society of Liberia.

Kru in War Ceremonies, Zoller, 1885. Photo: Unknown Photographer.

The rising global demand for palm products such as oil and piassava (palm fibers required for the brush industry) and the ensuing economic boom pushed migrants from the interior to create independent trade routes to the coastal area, bypassing intermediaries. However, the government based in Monrovia limited trade to specified sites and prohibited trade or hiring labor anywhere else. European powers that did not recognize the authority of the American-based government in Liberia and wished to expand their boarding colonies provided weapons and support to insurgents, destabilizing the precarious relations between the groups.

Kru wars, early 20th century. Photo: Unknown Photographer.

Liberian government leasing nearly 10% of the Land suitable for agriculture cultivation to Firestone Company in 1927. Studio Gad.

The Grebo thus found themselves in a dual-pronged conflict. Competing with tribes from the interior that sent their traders to the coastal area, they also faced conflicts with the settlers from America, who viewed the Grebo solely as a source of labor. Every few years, Grebo rebellions broke out, only to be brutally suppressed with warships and artillery provided by America and assisted by the notorious "frontier forces" trained to sustain themselves by looting the local population. Higher tariffs and strict regulation imposed at the trading points by a corrupt bureaucracy meant that the coastal area would remain in a state of chronic unrest.

In 1914, the outbreak of World War I dramatically changed this fragile balance of power. A British embargo brought maritime trade to a halt. Starved for income, the Liberian government imposed a Hut tax, leading to a general uprising in 1915. Again, American warships supported the settlers and quickly squashed the rebellion, burning villages and executing rebel leaders in the process.
By the 1930s, the Liberian government and its top-down economy, faced with chronic monetary shortages, signed agreements with the Spanish government and Dutch companies. This move sent thousands to forced labor, differing from slavery in name only. These actions followed the 1926 Firestone Agreement, in which the Liberian government leased 10% of the country's entire agricultural area to the tire company. The government sank further into debt, a trap from which it emerged only half a century later.

The poor economic outlook in the face of an impending world depression and the heavy tax burden led to another outbreak of unrest in 1931. Only the infusion of American capital to construct a U.S. Navy base followed by Liberia's integration into the war effort during World War II managed to calm the situation.

Red Caps, Warfare History Blog, B. Spark. Photo: Unknown Photographer.

History of Liberia Forum, D. Rumah. Photo: Unknown Photographer.

The representation of the Grebo in the history of Liberia written by American decent government officials was completely biased. Even today, there is no accurate portrayal of the Grebo who produced (among other things) the war mask that hung in Picasso's dining room in Montrouge, and thus had a major impact on twentieth century art.

The incongruity between the conventional image of the Grebo and the reality is especially jarring given that this "tribe of bloodthirsty cannibals" established one of the first democracies that adhered to the principle of separation of powers and guaranteed rights and freedom for its members. Further, there was clear separation

Interior of the home of H. Kahwriler's, Picasso's art dealer, Paris, 1912, Collection of G. Barnly. Photo: Unknown Photographer.

למיכאל תבדוק אם יש תיקון בכיתוב

Picasso's paperboard guitar construction.
Les Soire'es de Paris, 1913.

between ceremonial appointments for life and short term civil appointments, with mechanisms for rotating between the various power groups. In fact, it is possible to document an unbroken transition of social and governmental structures from the eighteenth century to the present day.

The most comprehensive work on this group, *Traditional History and Folklore of the Glebo Tribe*, was written by J. M. Johnson and published in 1957 by the Liberia Ministry of the Interior. A copy of this has survived the civil war and can now be found in the Library of Congress. From Johnson and other researchers, we learn that the basic unit of Grebo settlements is the *panton*, each consisting of a main patrilinear family and its branches. Each *panton* sends a representative, usually the oldest healthy male in the family, to the Council of Elders, known as the *panton nyefue*. The size of each village or city was assessed according to the number of these units. The Council of Elders would choose the *krogoba* or *worabanh,* city leader who serves in this position for the rest of his life. However, his leadership is not absolute, as he lacks authority to oust members from the council of elders. The council and its leader are responsible for the civil leadership of the village or city. In the past, the leader was viewed as a sort of civilian king, his every entrance or departure from the village accompanied by drums and ceremonies. Most of these civilian kings were chosen from the primary dynastic line of settlement's founders, although the position was not necessarily hereditary.

Liberian medicine man,
Halftone, Wellcome Collection.
Photo: Unknown Photographer.

Like other West African societies, the social structure is based on age groups. The three groups among the Grebo are:

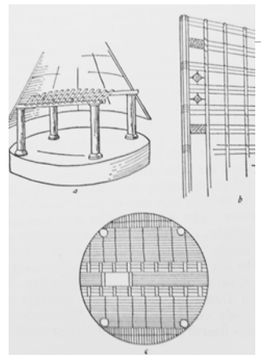
Gnbade: elders, who serve on the village council;
Sedibo: middle-aged adults, most of whom are married and with families;
Keyabo: youth with no political influence, but who serve on work groups, and more.

Another important role is that of *Krogba*, the head of the army, who is elected by the middle-aged group. Roles that are not part of age-based social structure include the *Deyabo* (medicine man), responsible for maintaining relations among the group's members as well as other West Africa secret societies, such as the "tiger" and "snake" societies.

'We wisdom mask,' 1935, Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art.
Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

During times of war, the head of the army had the authority to overrule the Council of Elders and take command. The person holding such an important role had to receive the blessing of an oracle located in the Putu Mountains, now part of Liberia's Sapo Nature Reserve. The oracle's decision regarding the head of the army was final and could not be appealed.

Another position elected by the council of elders was the *Bodio*, who supervised religious community life, kept the perpetual ritual fire burning, and maintained the prayer houses and the group treasury where religious relics were kept, known as the leopard mouth.



Grebo's treasury, leopard mouth,
Tribes of the Liberian Hinterland,
G. Schwab.

A Boido preforming deviations at John Davis town, Sapo reserve, Liberia, 2015.
Photo: Abou Kourouma.

African Star, 2017, Petitioner at Zwerdu Administration.
Photo: Unknown Photographer.

The first missionaries who arrived in the Cape Palmas area on the Liberian coast were surprised by the Grebos' complex governmental systems, their taboos and burial customs. The *Bodio* priest's black clothing and his various roles, such as maintaining a perpetual fire, together with the altar with horns, led them to develop complicated theories that the Grebo culture had its origins in Judaism.
Through the records of leaders appointed to the life-long roles, it is possible to track the history of settlements and villages from the time of their establishment.

One Grebo origin myths dates back to early eighteenth century. A group of people from the Niger region, fearing slave hunters, fled to the coastal area with their leader pudi momolla. During their river journeys, some of their boats capsized (*Wlebo*). The people who swam, called the *Wlebo*, became the founders of the people called the We. Those who succeeded in navigating the rapids with the agility of monkeys (*Glebo*) became the Gle people, also called the Grebo, or the monkey people.

Another origin myth refers to an elephant tusk, sunk deep in a lake in the Putu Mountains, containing magical substance that would grant its owner the power to conquer the coastal plain. Only a hunter who could dive and pull it to the surface would be able to lead a group of warriors to victory. The ivory tusk would then transform into a metal bracelet, symbolizing the hunter's election as leader. The hunter who returned with the metal

Kru Ring, Liberian Studies Journal, 1970.

bracelet and became the first Grebo's leader was Nyama Kewa. On their way to the coastal plain, the founding fathers stopped and established a city they called Pahn, now identified with the city of Zwedru, the administrative center of Grand Gedeh County, which includes the Putu mountain range and Liberia's Sapo Nature Reserve. To this day, this is the location of the oracle whose blessing is needed to appoint a new head of the army.

Meeting Mr. Williams, a Grebo Boido, Zerikor, Putu, Liberia, 2015. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Grebo, Liberia, Studio Gad.

Boido at John Davis town, Sapo, 2015. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

The Grebo villages bordering the Sapo Nature Reserve are geographically isolated. The very mention of their names protected the community throughout the Liberian civil war throughout the 1990s, and the Grebo were largely left alone.

In 2015, I was notified that Mr. Williams, who served as a bodio in one of the communities near Sapo reserve would like to finance infrastructure works in the village by selling some of the group's paraphernalia. Preliminary meetings were held outside the village, at a hunting lodge near

Divination enactment, Tima's sacred wood, 2016. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Zerikore. As the relationship matured, the meetings were moved and held publicly in John Davis village bordering the Sapo reserve.

During these visits, the use of sacred items intended for sale was demonstrated, such as the Grebo divination boards used as portable coliseums to choreograph ceremonies honoring the spirits of the forest performed at night in the depths of the sacred forest.

Ritual cleansing and Farewell rituals, Tima's sacred wood, 2016. Photo: Abou Kourouma.

Siegmann with N.Y. City's mayor Dinkins, Brooklyn Museum, 1992. Photo: J. V. Strong.

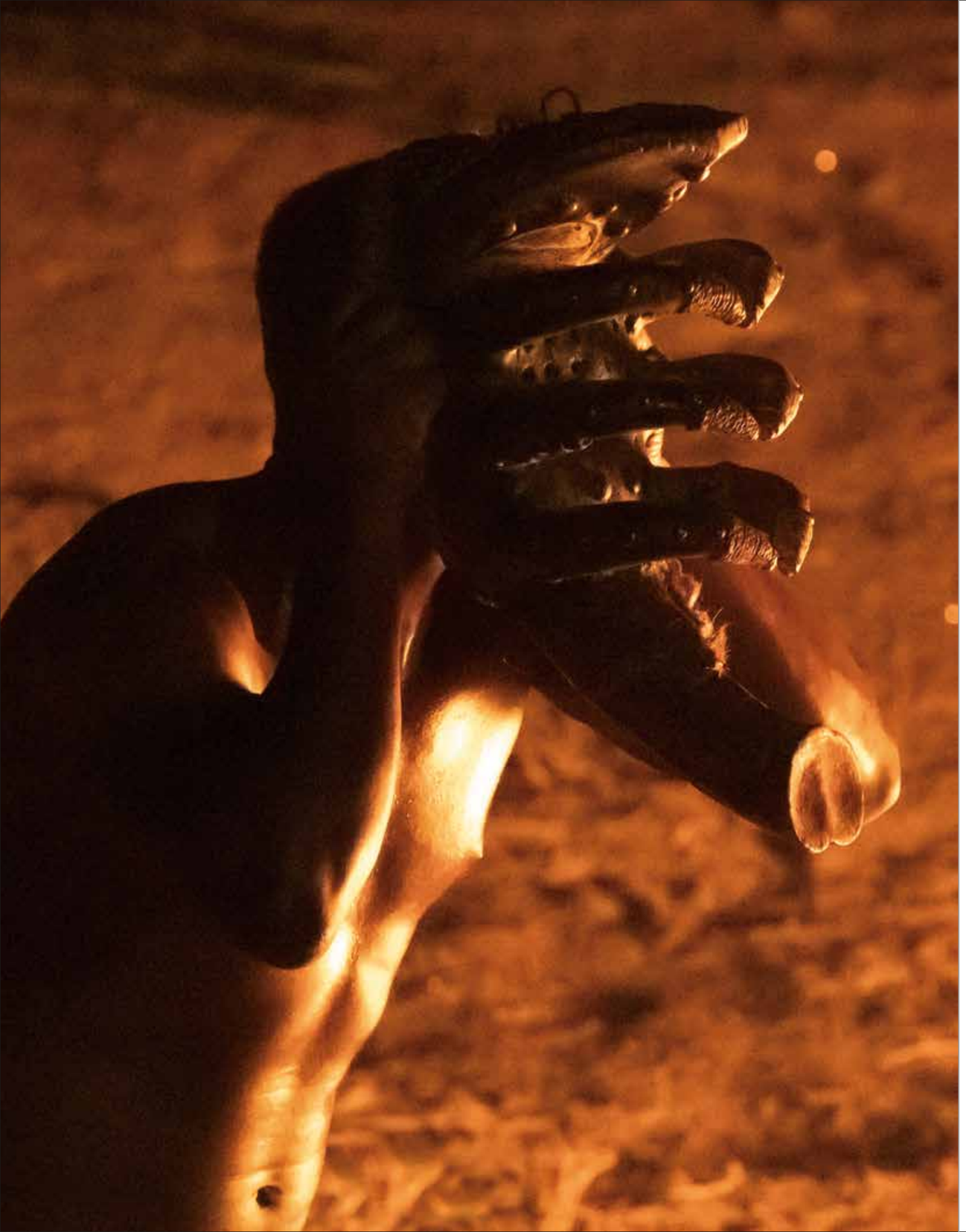
There are strong ties between the Grebo communities in the Ivory Coast and Liberia. Intermarriage is customary, thus expanding kinship circles beyond the local group. Prior to the civil war, the Liberian government sponsored initiation camps in the forest and hosted groups from the Ivory Coast and Guinea, where such were completely banned. The government also supported the establishment of a local museum of forest cultures established by William Siegmann who gained prominence as the Brooklyn Museum African art curator.

Women association divination figure, 98x17x12 cm, John Davis town, Sapo, Liberia,1952, Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art.
Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

Over the years, the Grebo communities in Liberia and the Ivory Coast developed different formal languages. Artwork from the Ivory Coast underwent a process of abstraction and refinement, creating a more complex collage of elements. For example, the eye slits in the Ivorian mask Coast are obscured by a diagonal lattice symbolizing the branches of forest trees. In contrast, Liberian masks, created in more isolated communities, preserved the original iconography almost unchanged. These correspond with illustrations dated from the beginning of the twentieth century. Masks were exchanged during joint ceremonies and preserved in the society treasuries commemorating these events. This subject of the variations in the formal vocabulary used by the different Grebo communities clearly calls for further research.

Kroutz, Dr. Richard, 1901, Lubec Museum.

Men's association mask, 51x19x15 cm, Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.



1

Elephant elder's power mask

Grebo people, Liberia
Sapo Reserve, Putu Mountains

Circa 1945
Wood, paint, metal, organic residues
34x23x46

A mask used by the Men's association, its power is manifested by a hybrid of the forest's most powerful beings: the wild boar and the elephant. The top horizontal part is covered by ceremonial offering.

לאלכס תיקון
רקע

2 **A pair of ceremonial planks**

Grebo people, Liberia

Circa 1951
Wood, pigmentation
38x14x128
40x15x120

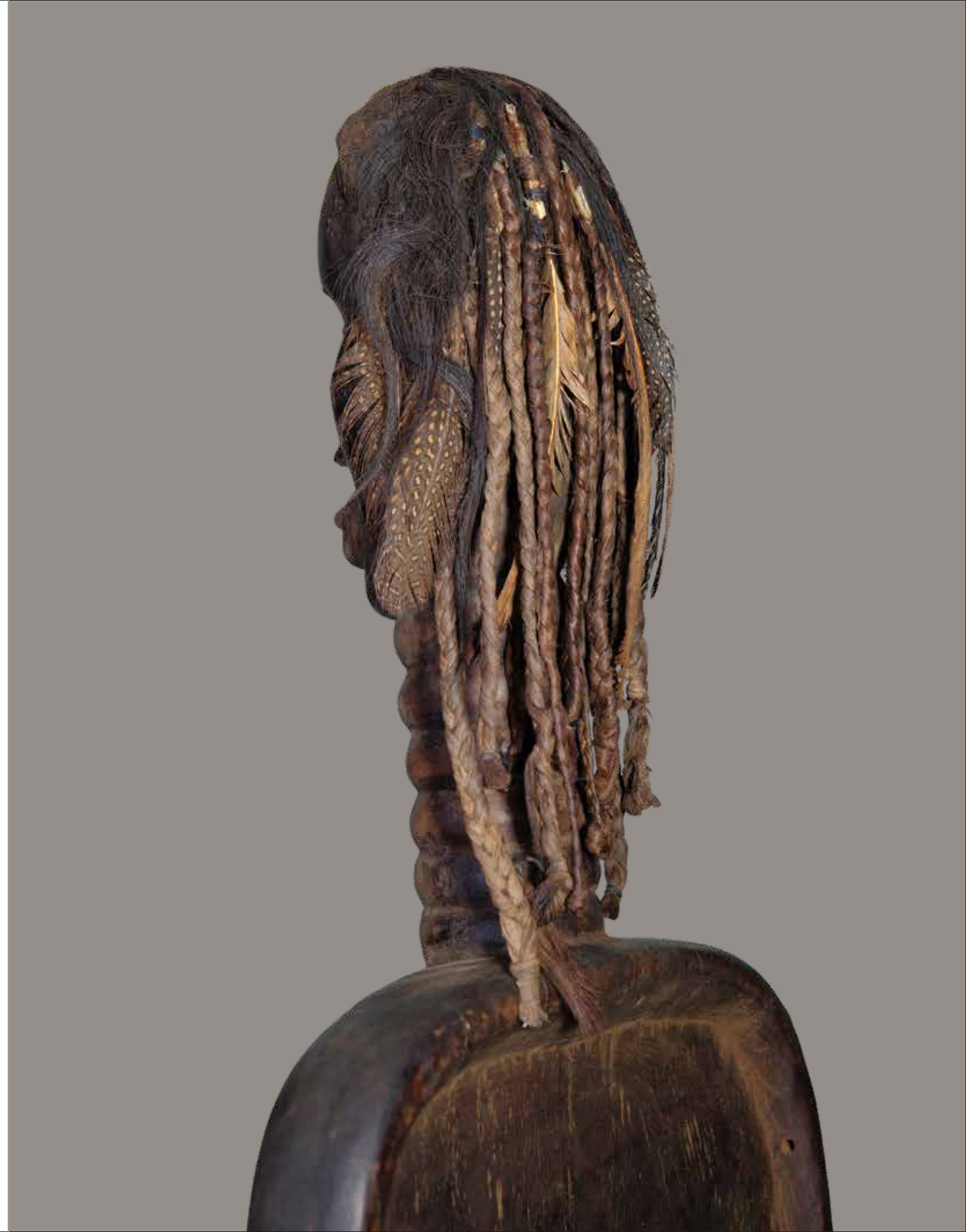
Ceremonial planks used as coulisse during ceremonies and sacrifices in the sacred wood.

3 **Ceremonial plank**

Grebo people, Liberia
Sapo Reserve, Putu Mountains

Circa 1944
Wood, feathers, kaolin, hair, and fiber
38x16x142

Ceremonial plank used as coulisse during ceremonies and sacrifices in the sacred wood. The ceremonial planks were considered as the women's association possession, but entry to the sacred water in order to purify the plank was reserved for men only.



4 **Initiation ceremony mask**

Putu Mountains, Liberia

1938
Wood, cowrie shells, mirror, cotton cloth,
Feathers, and hair
96x25x22

Such mask would “swallow” the young initiates upon entering the sacred bush. The ceremonial scarification would symbolize overcoming that ordeal, followed by their rebirth as graduates of the Poro bush school.

5 **Human eating mask, Dan / Grebo (Dandai)**

1937
Wood, cowrie shells, mirror, cotton cloth, Feathers, hair
112x25

According to Harley, such masks were supposed to swallow the young initiates. The teeth marks of the mask's great jaws were the ceremonial scarification.

6 **Elder's mask**

Grebo people, Liberia
Reserve, Putu Mountains

Circa 1942
Wood, metal, indigo, pigmentation
30x20x15

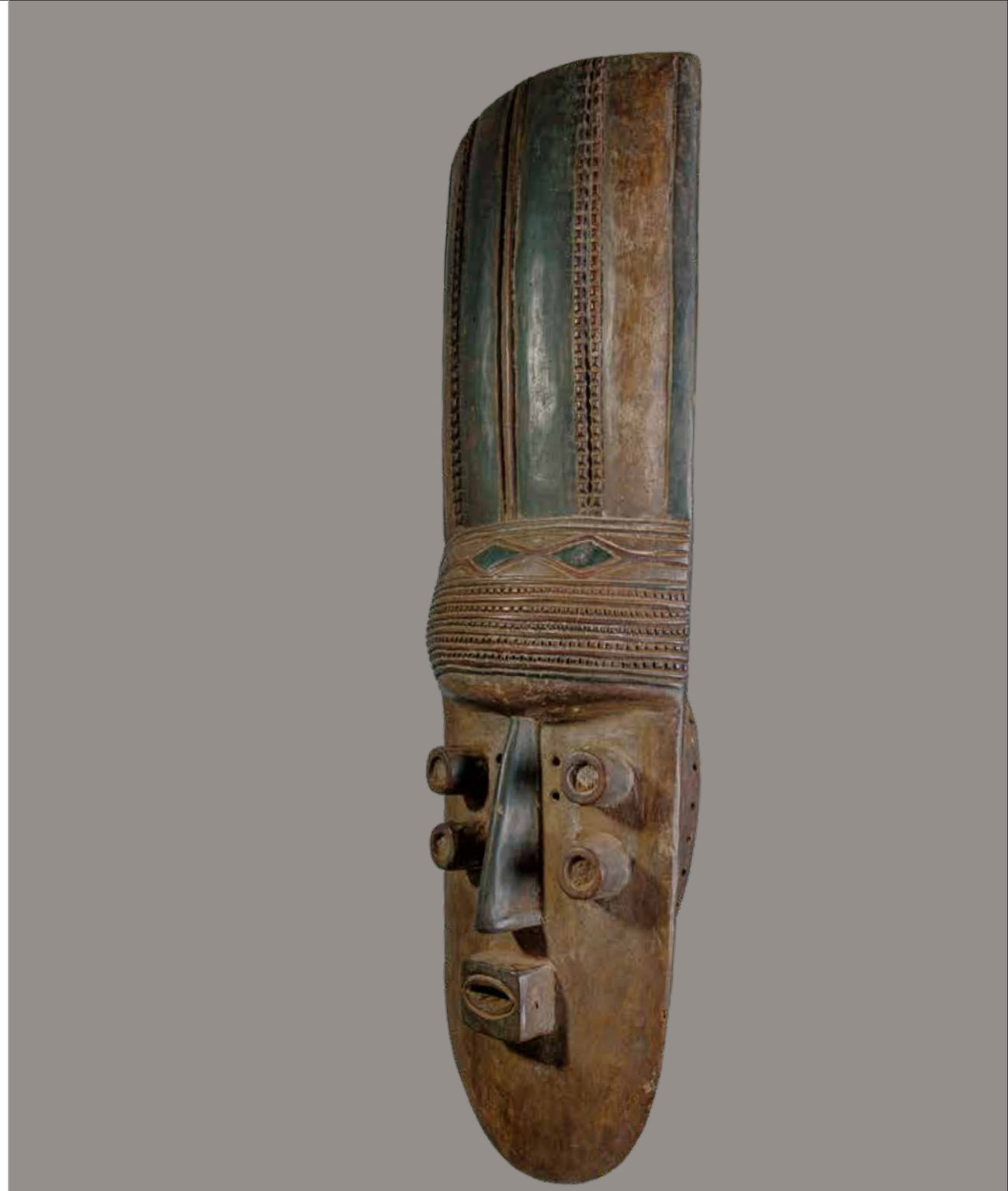
Men's association ceremonial mask.

7 **War mask**

Grebo people, Liberia

Circa 1954
Wood, pigmentation
76x26x16

War mask, its many eyes enable the wearer to "see" in all the realms.
Such mask can be found in Yale University, Benenson Collection, 2006.51.210 T1885, Zoller, hugo.



8

Elder's mask

Grebo people, Liberia
Sapo Reserve, Putu Mountains

Circa 1948
Wood, pigmentation
33x23x19

Men's association ceremonial mask.

9 **Elder's mask**

Grebo people, Liberia
Sapo Reserve, Putu Mountains

Circa 1964
Wood, indigo, pigmentations
33x23x17

Men's association ceremonial mask.

10 **Ceremonial mask**

Grebo people, Liberia
Sapo Reserve, Putu Mountains

Early twentieth century
Wood, metal, pigmentations
46x18x20

Men's association ceremonial mask.

11 **Ceremonial mask**

Grebo people, Liberia
Sapo Resereve, Putu Mountains

Early twentieth century
Wood, bells, glass beads, metal,
sacrificial materials, pigmentations
47x18x16

12 **Ceremonial mask**

Grebo people, Liberia
Sapo Reserve, Putu Mountains

1953
Wood, metal, pigmentations, raffia, animal bones
42x18x20

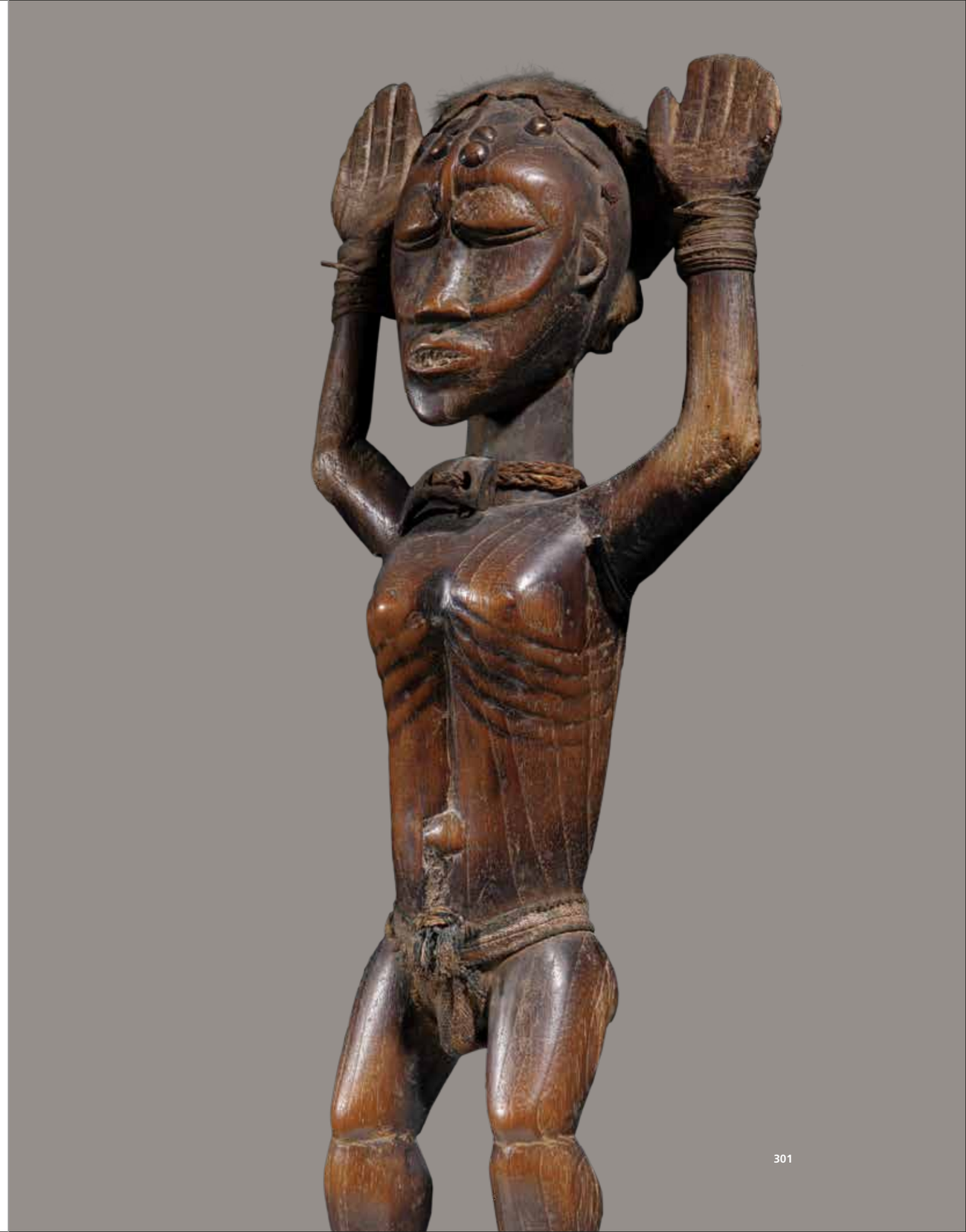
13 **Grebo male youth figure**
(Lu Me)

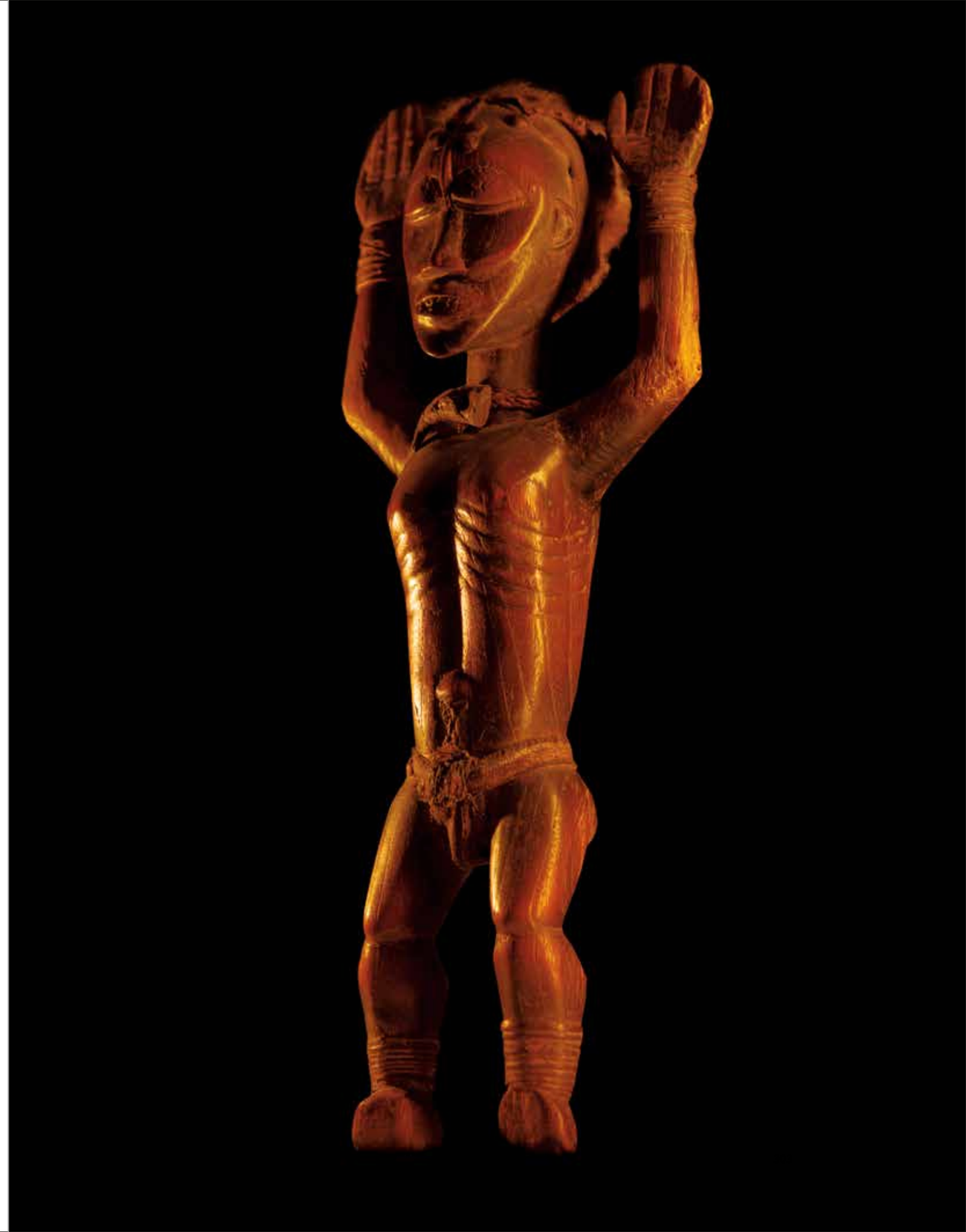
Grebo people, Liberia

1945
Wood, Metal, Tiger clow, leather pigmentations
44x17x8

His uncircumcised genitalia is covered.
And he is adorned with power symbols,
such as a tiger's claw.
His hair is presented by a monkey's hide.
The metal studs and the metal wire
decorations would glow during the divination.

Right: Grebo drum, detail, Ross Archive
of African Images.





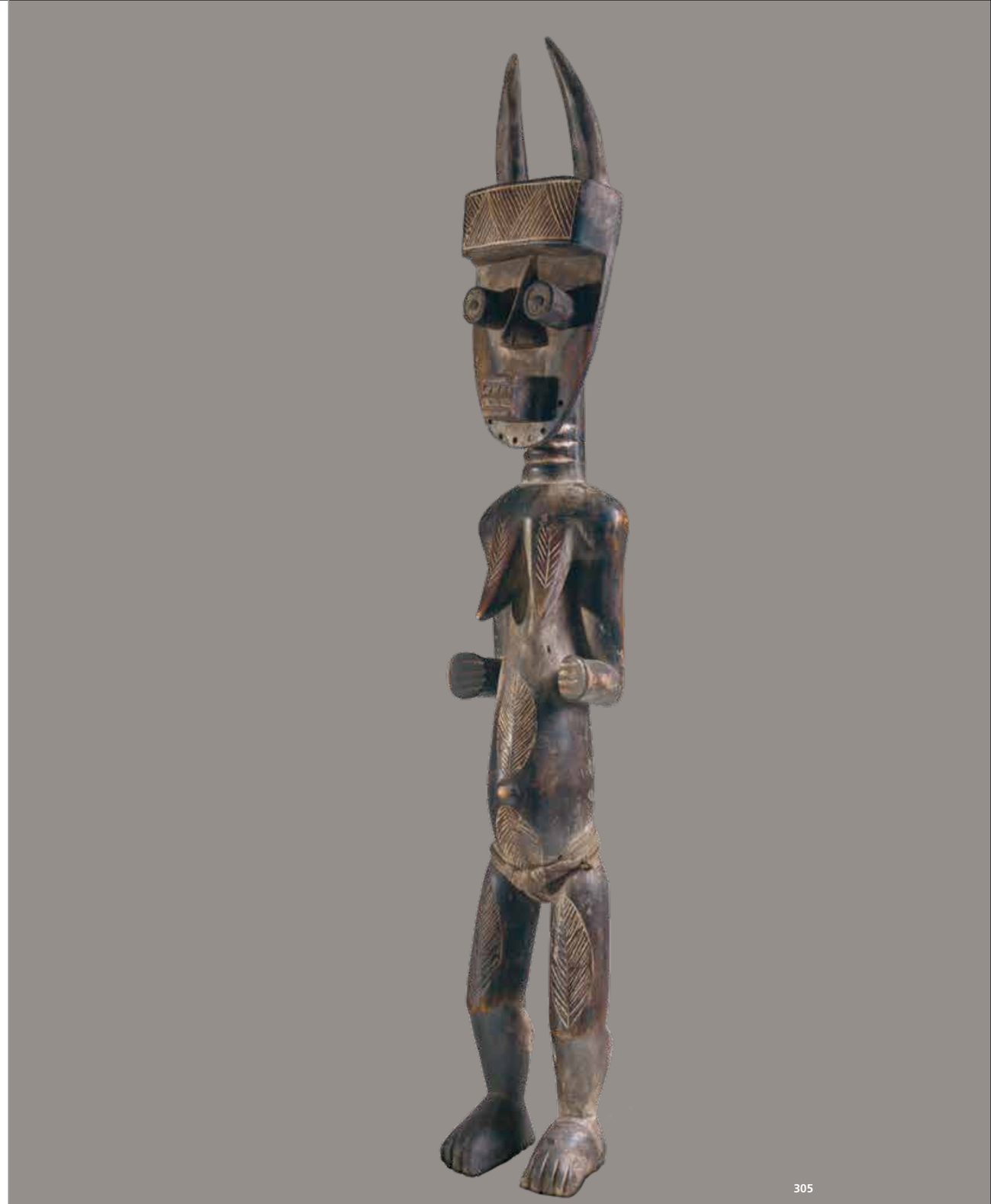
14 **Women's association divination figure**

Grebo people, Liberia
Sapo Resereve, Putu Mountains

1952
Wood, cane, pigmentation
98x17x12

Masks such as the one worn by this figure can be traced to early Twentieth Century publications, R. Kroutz, 1901, Lubec Museum.

Right: Oldman w.o. illustrated catalog of ethnographic specimens. Vol X. 1913.



The Chicken and the Raven

The chicken was struck with fear
When it became suddenly clear
That the raven was caught
In the net that was ought
to make the chicken disappear.
The chicken thought, “I can’t be displaced!
It seems the raven will take my place
For I am more slow
I have nowhere to go!
I must make sure to keep my space.”

Evil Comes Back to Those Who Sow It

He who decides
To lay a trap,
To dig a big hole,
Or do something bad
Should be wary
Of these words of advice:
“He who sows evil
Has it coming in strides”

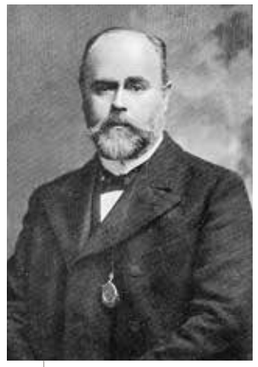
SHERBRO MASTER

The Last Sherbro Master

Installation at the 2022 exhibition, MUZA, Tel Aviv, "Art of the Enchantments." Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

One of the most prominent collectors and dealers in Guinea in the last two decades of the twentieth century was Ismail Kaba, who divided his time between Paris and Conakry.

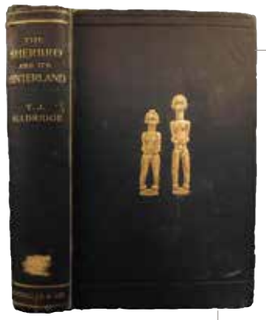
Presented here are five pieces crafted in the 1920s by an outstanding Mende/Sherbro Master from the coast of Sierra Leone, a well-known artist at the time whose name was regrettably lost following the long wars in Sierra Leone. These works were among Kaba's most prized possessions that he considered the pinnacle of his long career. His sons have related countless stories of his many endeavors to obtain them.



Thomas Joshua Alldridge, 1847-1916.

In the early 1920s, this master brought to its apex an art form that had been evolving for decades in the hands of his predecessors. Examples of works typical to this genre had been introduced to the Western audience by Thomas Joshua Alldridge, a palm oil merchant employed by the British Crown as a travel commissioner in Sierra Leone at the dawn of the nineteenth century. Between 1871 and his retirement from service in 1909, Aldridge traveled extensively in the area, documenting the changes wrought by the colonial regime. A gifted photographer and writer, he was also a tireless collector who supplemented his government salary by selling "curiosities" that were later dispersed around the globe by various dealers.

Alldridge chose images of two such figures to be imprinted in gold on the cover of the 1906 edition



Book cover of *The Sherbro and its Hinterland*, inside fig 44 – 'Bundu Girls, Upper Mendi', T. J. Alldridge, 1901.

"The author at his cottage," transformed colony, T. J. Alldridge, 1910.

Left: 'Mende Figure,' British Museum, African Art, Tabard Press, 1968. Photo: ???
Right: Sherbro divination figure, Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art. Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

of his book, *The Sherbo and its Hinterland*. Today the figures are in the collection of the British Museum, which, according to a 1967 publication, should have also housed an elongated statue by the same master and collected by Kaba. However, this has now, unfortunately, been lost.

Alldridge's photos offer us a glimpse into the world for which these works were created. They depict young initiates in Sande (a women's association) emerging from their seclusion in the sacred forest, their bodies anointed with palm oil, clad solely in silver jewelry, and their hair elaborately coiffed.

Alldridge marveled at the girls' beauty, the harmony of their chanting, their impeccable manners, and their graceful dancing.

The Sande and Yassi were the main women's associations in Sierra Leone, controlling all aspects of their female members' lives. Membership in them was a prerequisite for attaining adulthood.

'Three Kambehs of the Yassi Society', fig 45, *The Sherbro and its Hinterland*, T. J. Alldridge, 1901.

Supreme head of a women's chapter (majo), *Representing Women*, Ruth Philips, 1995, University of California Press.

Sherbro, Yassi, two divination figures, Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art.
Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

Unlike their counterparts in the Guinea forest, the women's associations in Sierra Leone were controlled by "Big Women," who were fully integrated into the "colonial" economy and slave trade and were familiar with personal gain, a concept alien to the bush societies of Guinea.

These figures were called min-si-le, the Sherbro/ Bullom for "spirits," or saraka, which can be translated as "medicine."

Their actual role in the society's rituals is unknown to us due mainly to the vow of secrecy taken by all members of West African women's associations.

The statues were probably used in healing rituals or during atonements for broken taboos in order to invoke spiritual assistance. As such, they were crucial to an individual's recovery.

Closer scrutiny of Alldridge's photos reveals the apparent despair in the eyes of the young girls, who were circumcised and peddled to serve as second or third wives for male members of Sierra Leone's leading rural families.

'Showing ...upper Mendi hair style', fig 34, *The Sherbro and its Hinterland*, T. J. Alldridge, 1901.

These five pieces conform to the classic Mende and Sherbro ideals of beauty, including the distinctive tightly braided coiffure, narrow almond-shaped eyes, petite face, and ringed neck.

Although based on canonical forms, they transcend cultural barriers. Free of any "atavistic" trends, they are semi-abstract depictions of the female nude.

'Bundu Girls, Vassa County', fig 65 (detail), *The Sherbro and its Hinterland*, T. J. Alldridge, 1901.

Mende Sowei mask, Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art.
Photo: Dorian Gottlieb.

In contrast to figures from the neighboring Guinea coast, in which the female form is depicted as an object of power, creation, or motherhood, those from Sierra Leone reflect more of the Western concept of the female nude and are portrayed as objects of beauty, desire, and longing. They are idealized female forms, as profound as those of their Western counterparts.

1 **Divination figure of a young graduate (Minsere)**

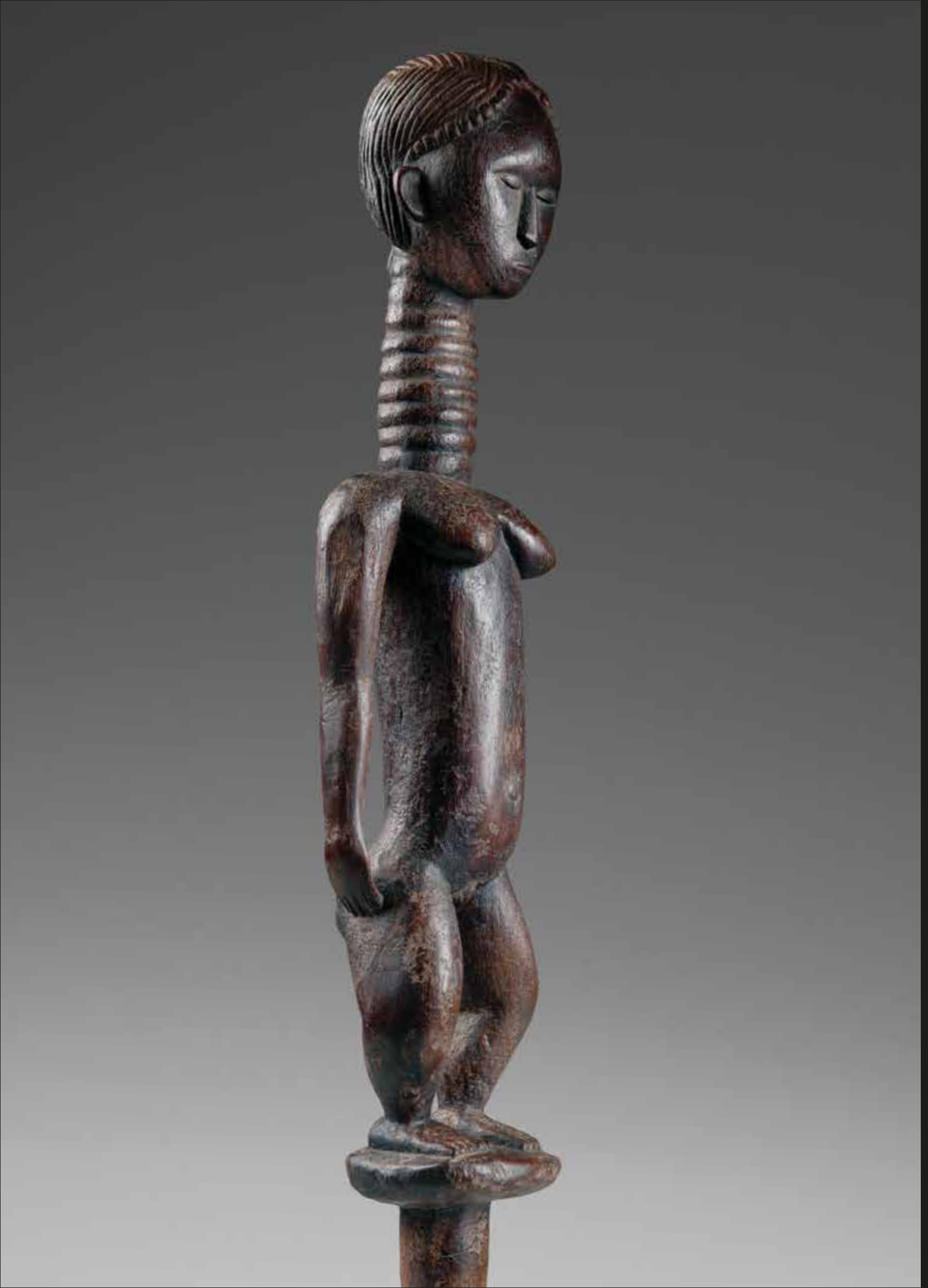
Sherbro, Sierra Leone
Circa 1920
Teak wood, pigmentation
102x26x22

A figure of a young maiden upon graduation from the bush school. She stand upon two cola nuts, the source of the women's society wealth and are used as an offering.

Divination figure of a young graduate

Sherbro Master

Divination figure of a young graduate



2

Staff of women's association elder

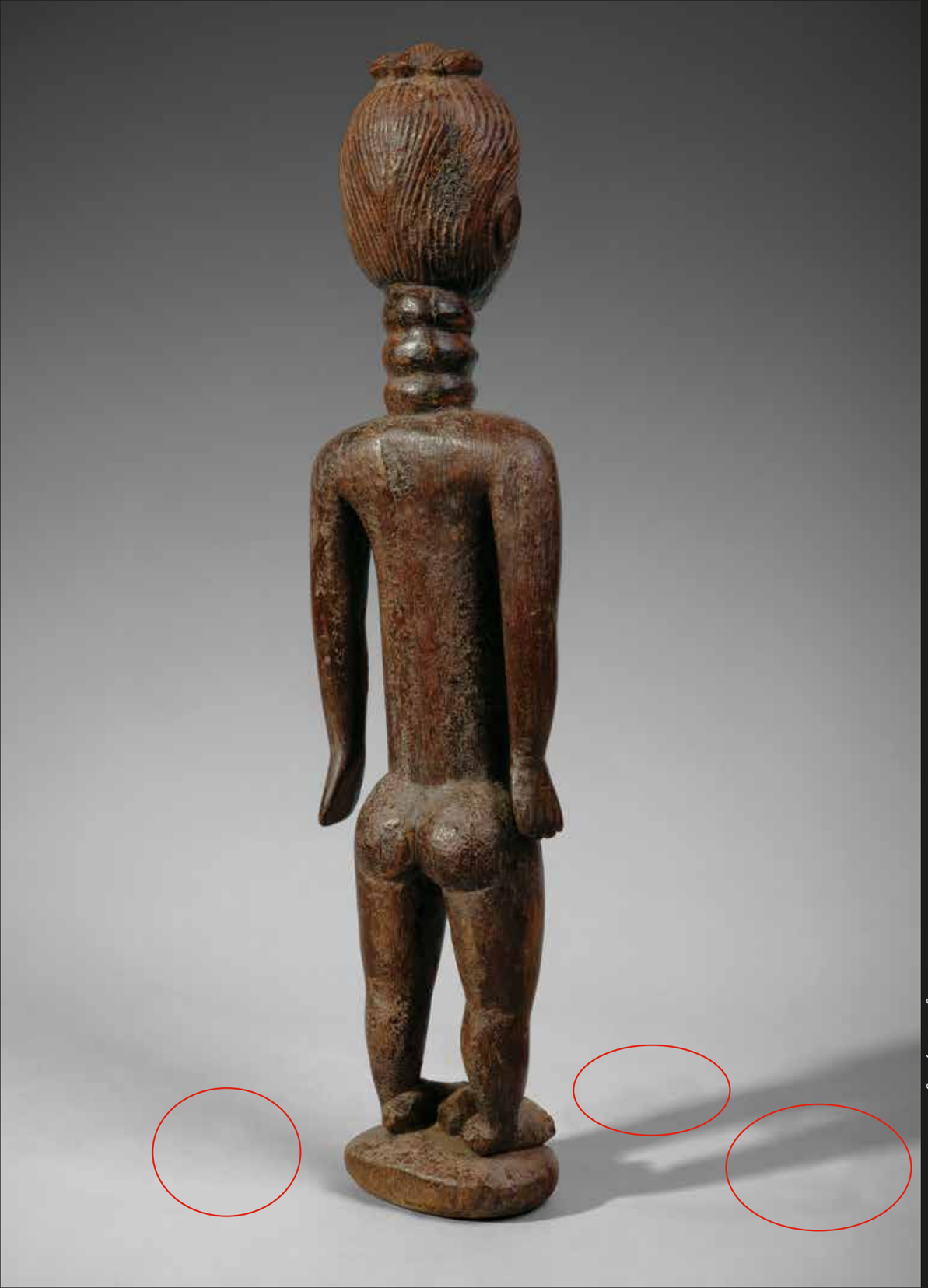
Sherbro, Sierra Leone
Circa 1930
Teak wood, pigmentation
70x16x9

Ceremonial staff depicting an idealized figure of a girl upon graduation, oiled, groomed, and naked. Her elongated rippled neck signifies her beauty.

Staff of women's association elder

Sherbro Master

Staff of women's association elder



3

Idealized figure of a young initiate upon graduation from the bush school (Minsere)

Sherbro, Sierra Leone
Circa 1930
Teak wood, pigmentation
58x14x9

Idealized Figure of a young initiate

Sherbro Master

Idealized Figure of a young initiate

4 **Figure of a young initiate dancing at the graduation ceremonies (Minsere)**

Sherbro, Sierra Leone
Circa 1925
Teak wood, pigmentation
97x22x20

A girl dancing during graduation celebrations.

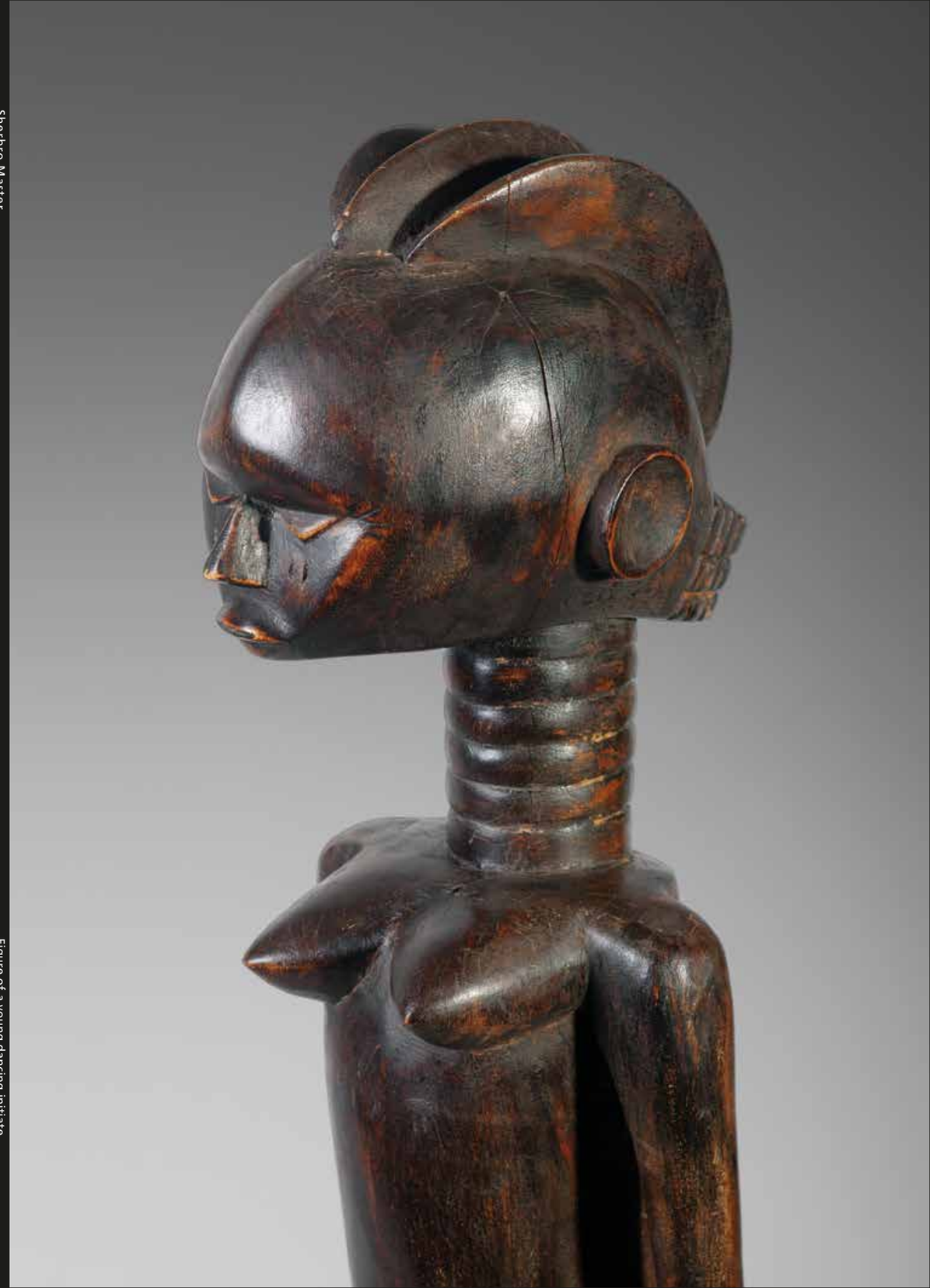
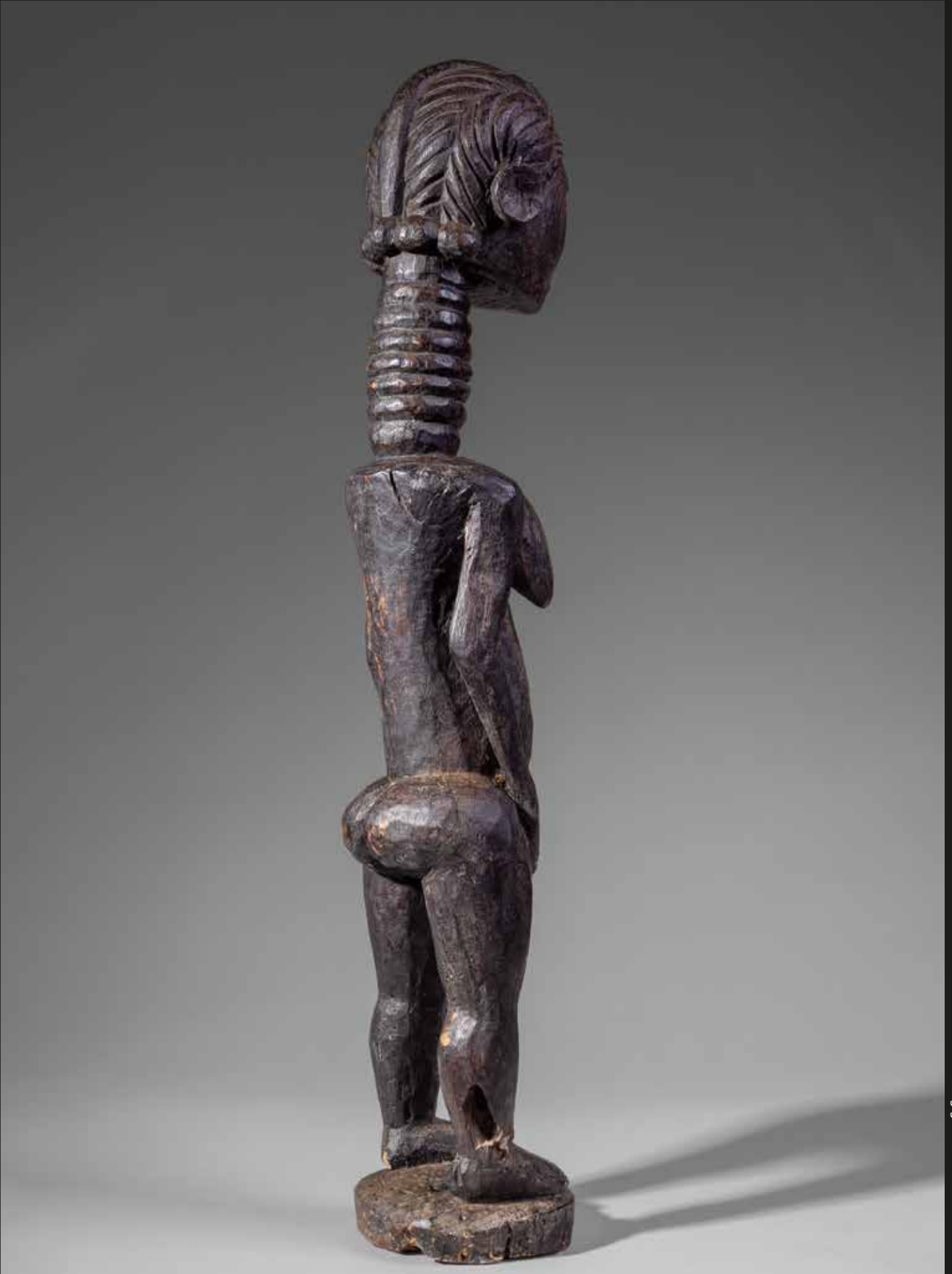


Figure of a young dancing initiate

Figure of a young dancing initiate



5

Young graduate
(Minsere)

Sherbro, Sierra Leone
Circa 1925
Teak wood, pigmentation
82x17x12

A figure of a young maiden upon graduation from the bush school. Her elongated neck reflects her beauty, the neck rings echo water ripples and her being chosen by the spirits.

Young graduate

Sherbro Master

Young graduate

6 **Sande association helmet mask (Sowei)**

Vai people, Liberia.
Circa 1931
Wood, pigmentations
43x24x24

The stylized hair bans indicate germination and birth, the bat / snakes symbolize human procreation.

7

Sande association helmet mask (Ndoli jowei)

Mende people, Sierra Leone
1929
Wood, pigmentations
46x24x24

Work attributed to the same master, Brooklyn Museum. Published in, Tribal Arts of Africa.

8

Sowei helmet mask,
(Ndoli Jowei)

Mende people, Sierra Leone
Early twentieth century
Wood, pigmentations
53x21x19

Left: 'Bundu Girls, Vassa County',
fig 65 (detail), *The Sherbro and its Hinterland*, T. J. Alldridge, 1901.

9 **Pre initiation maiden figure**

Mende people, Sierra Leone
1964
Wood, pigmentations
65x15x12

Pre initiation idealized figure.
Her beauty and grooming is
reflected by her elaborate hairstyle
and elongated coiled neck.
Her health is expressed by her perfect
teeth. She is portrayed wearing
underpants due to being uncircumcised.

Mende Master

Pre initiation maiden figure

Pre initiation maiden figure

Mende Master

Pre initiation maiden figure

No Hippopotamus Will Share a Lake

Two head hippos controlling a space
Would not be content to share the lake.

As on a ship, the captain's in charge
He loves to command, to lead, to discharge.
And he would not settle to share the prow–
Only one captain can harness the bow.
Here too, the peace is never whole
When two leaders are chosen to share the same role.

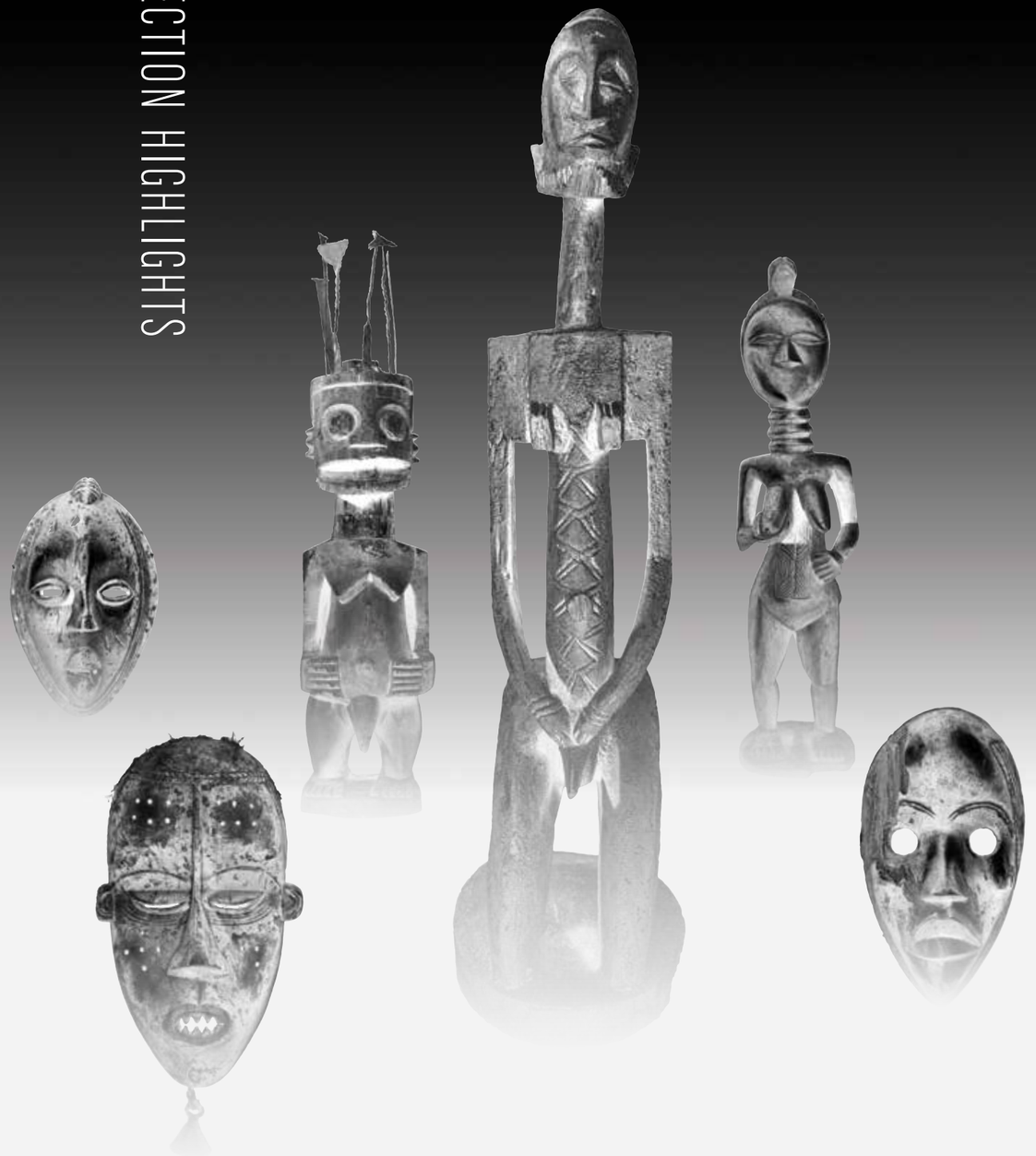
Alligators Have Gods Too

When a man of deep faith
Goes down to the river
And takes no precautions
He'll enter and shiver

For the alligator, too,
Has faith and feels awe
And believes that this man
Is food from his God.

Even with faith in God, and trust,
Remember that nature is violent and just.

COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

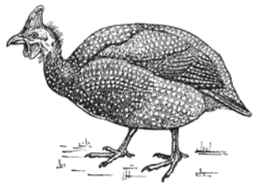


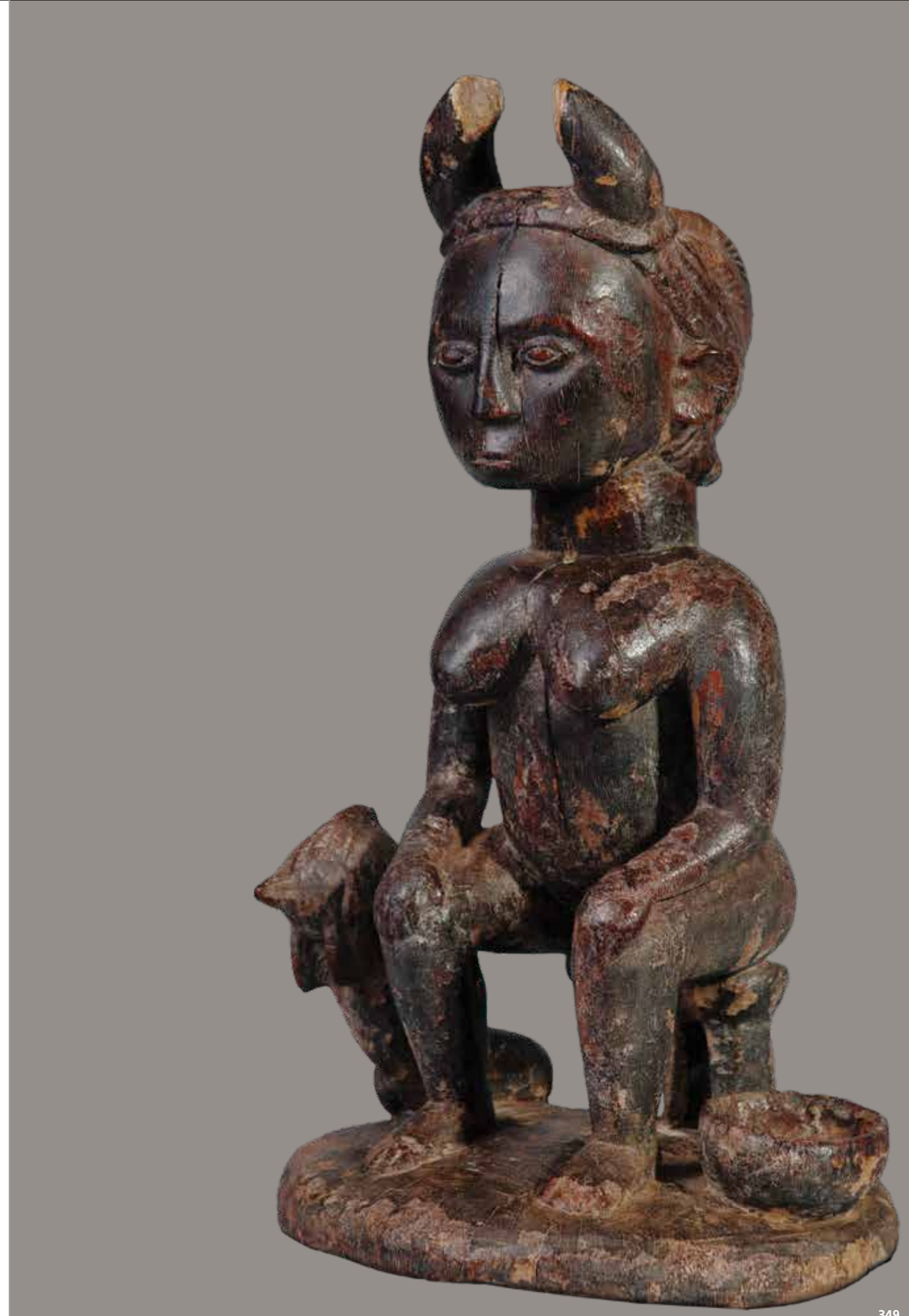
1 **Altar piece, Bidjogo**

Bidjogo people, Guinea Bissau
Circa 1938
Wood
38x21x18

A figure of young initiate accompanied by a snake with a Guinea fowl head.

Right: Guinea Fowl, shutter box images.





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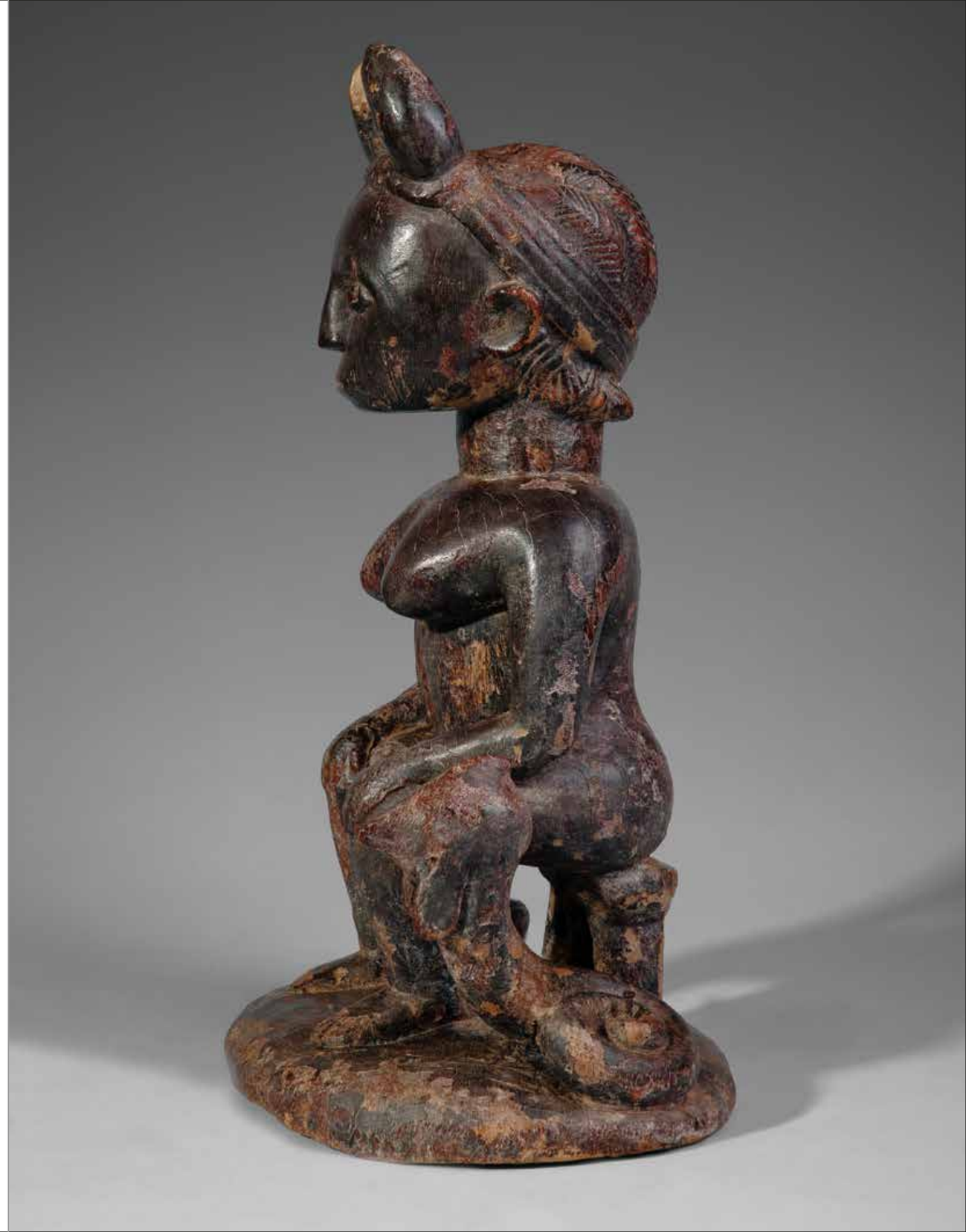

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לאלכס תיקון
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2 **Bull warriors mask**

Bidjogo people, Guinea Bissau
Circa ????
Wood, paint, raffia, horns, metal & pigmentation
43x60x33

Right: Bernatzik, Bidjogo, Abby.
127 P. 1943, Gratz

3 **Ox initiation mask**

Bidjogo people, Guinea Bissau
Circa ????
Wood, paint, horns
52x41x33

Right photo: Hugo Bernatzik, 1931.

4 **Bull initiation mask**

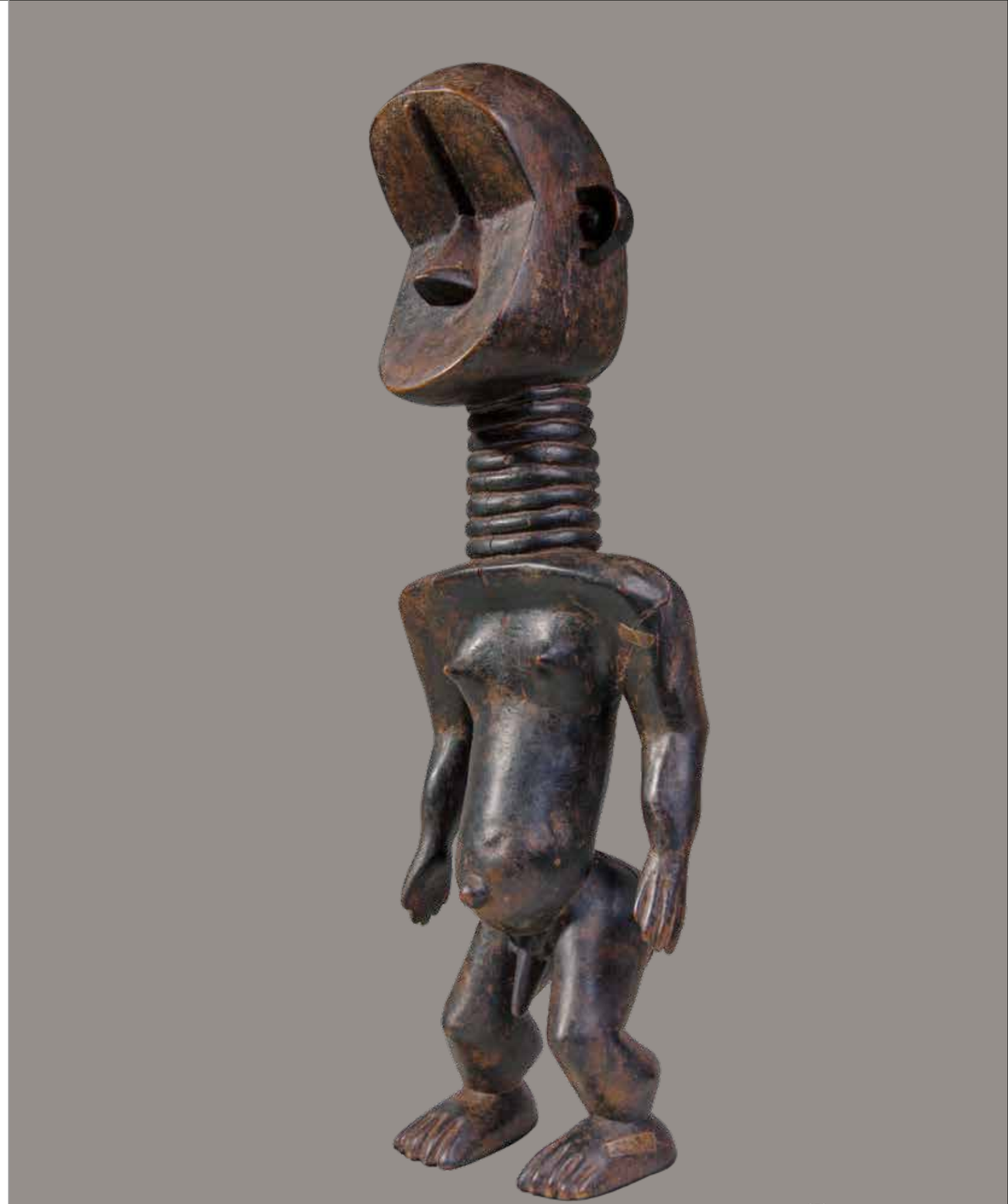
Bidjogo people, Guinea Bissau
Early twentieth century
Wood, paint, horn
41x50x35

5

Initiation figure
(Yahweh)

Loma people, Libera
Circa 1945
Wood, pigmentations, organic residues
63x22x14

The name *Yahwah* is composed of two words: *Ya* – sitting down, and *Wa* – to hurt. During the circumcision procedure the boys who sat on a long crossbar gained fortitude by putting a hand on the figure's head in order to pass the ordeal.



6 **Assassin mask**

Loma people, Libera
Circa 1934
Wood, pigmentation, metal, cotton
59x23x22

Tiger association, assassin mask.
Member's authority symbol was a three blade adze.

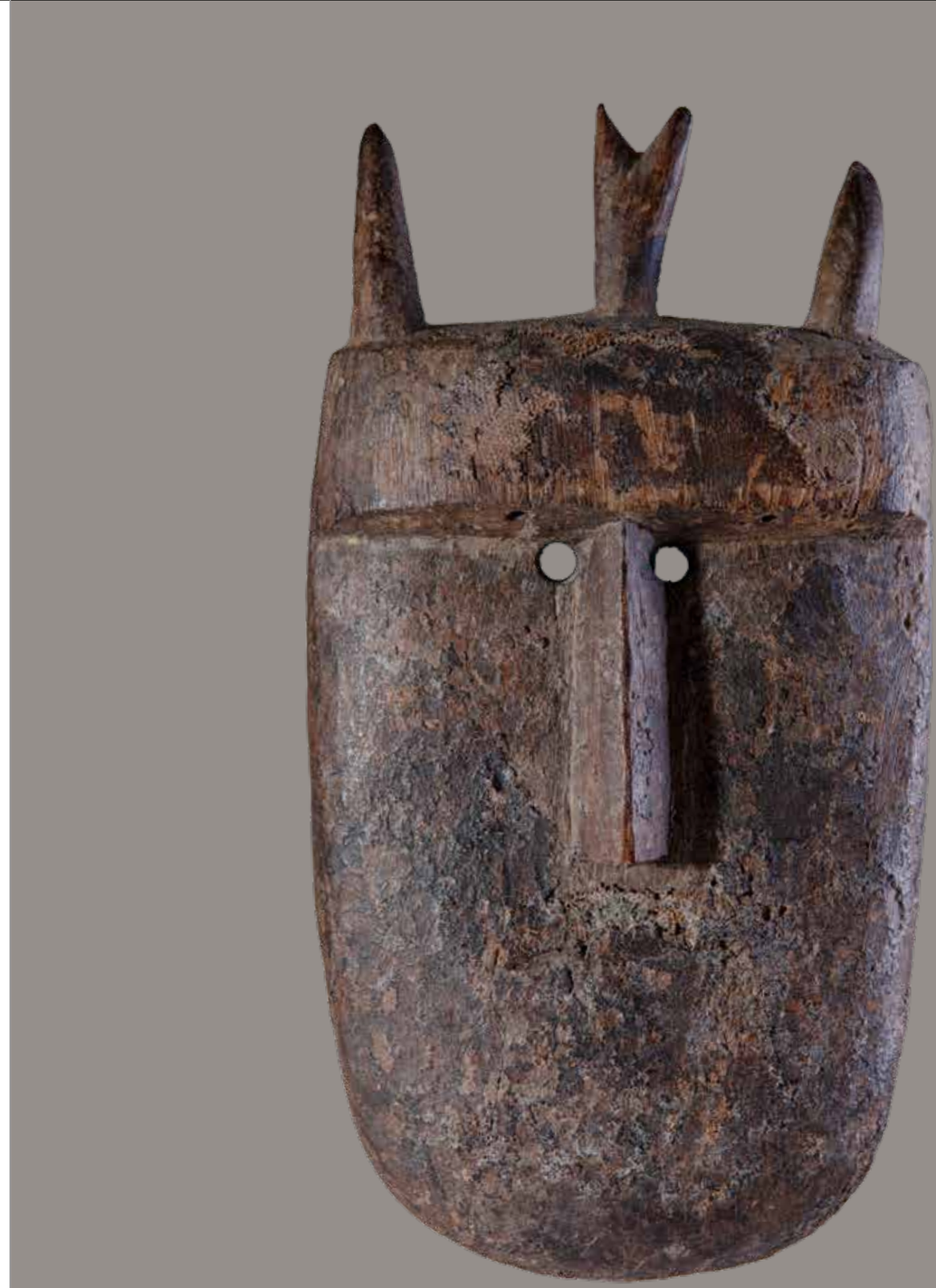
Right photo: P. D. Gaisseau, 1953.

7

Ceremonial mask
(Angbai)

Loma people, Guinea
Circa 1935
Wood, pigmentations, organic residues
32x16x7

Right: *The Sacred Forest*, A. Knoff 1954.
Photo: P. D. Gaisseau, 1953.



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8 **Dancer's dorsum mask**

Koranko people, Guinea
1945
Wood, metal, bells, leather pigmentations,
organic substance
44x17x8

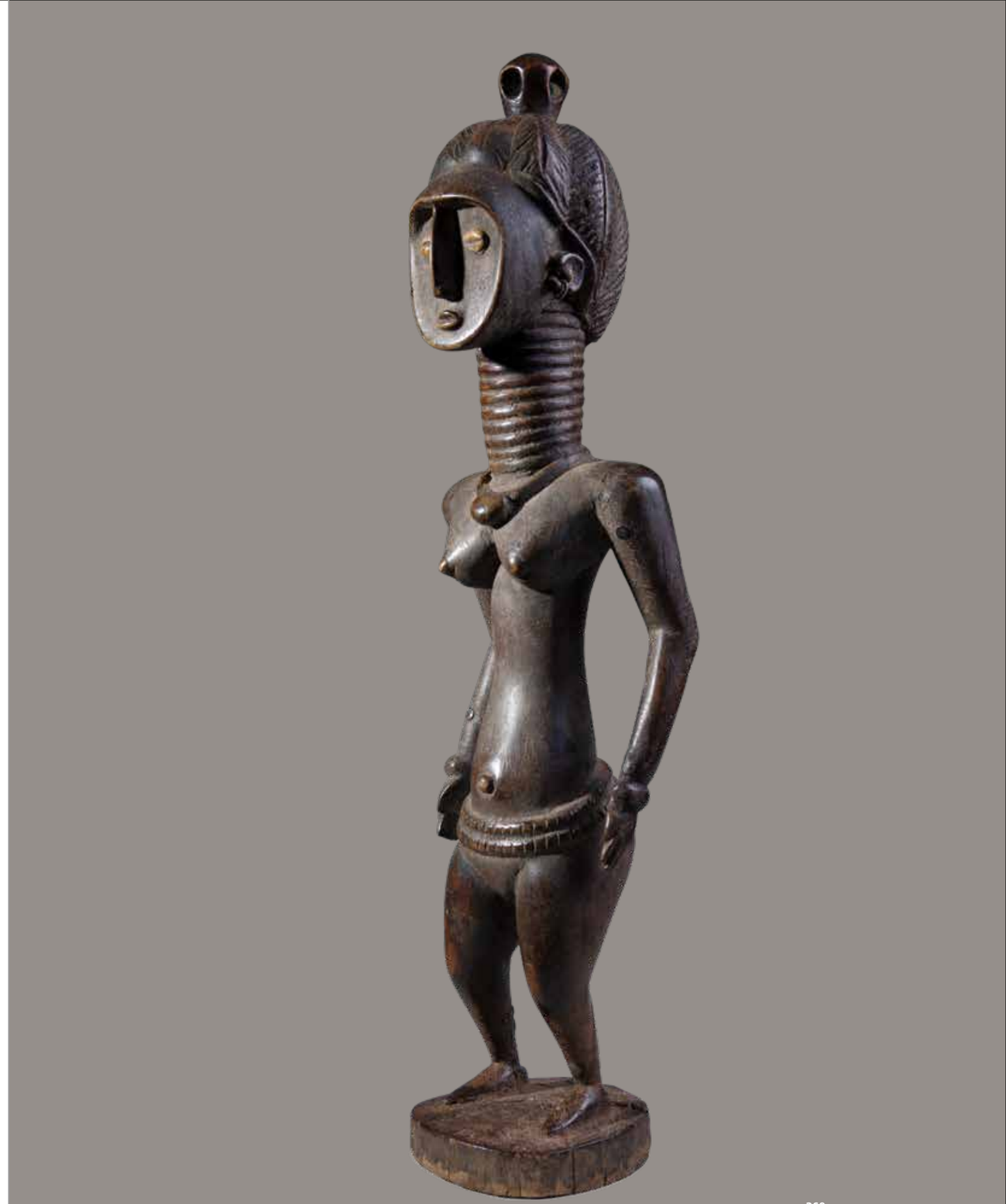
9 **Entertainment mask**

Temne people, Sierra Leone
Mid-twentieth century.
49x17x11

10 **Divination figure**

Temne people, Sierra Leone
1935
Wood, cypress shell, pigmentation
74x22x15

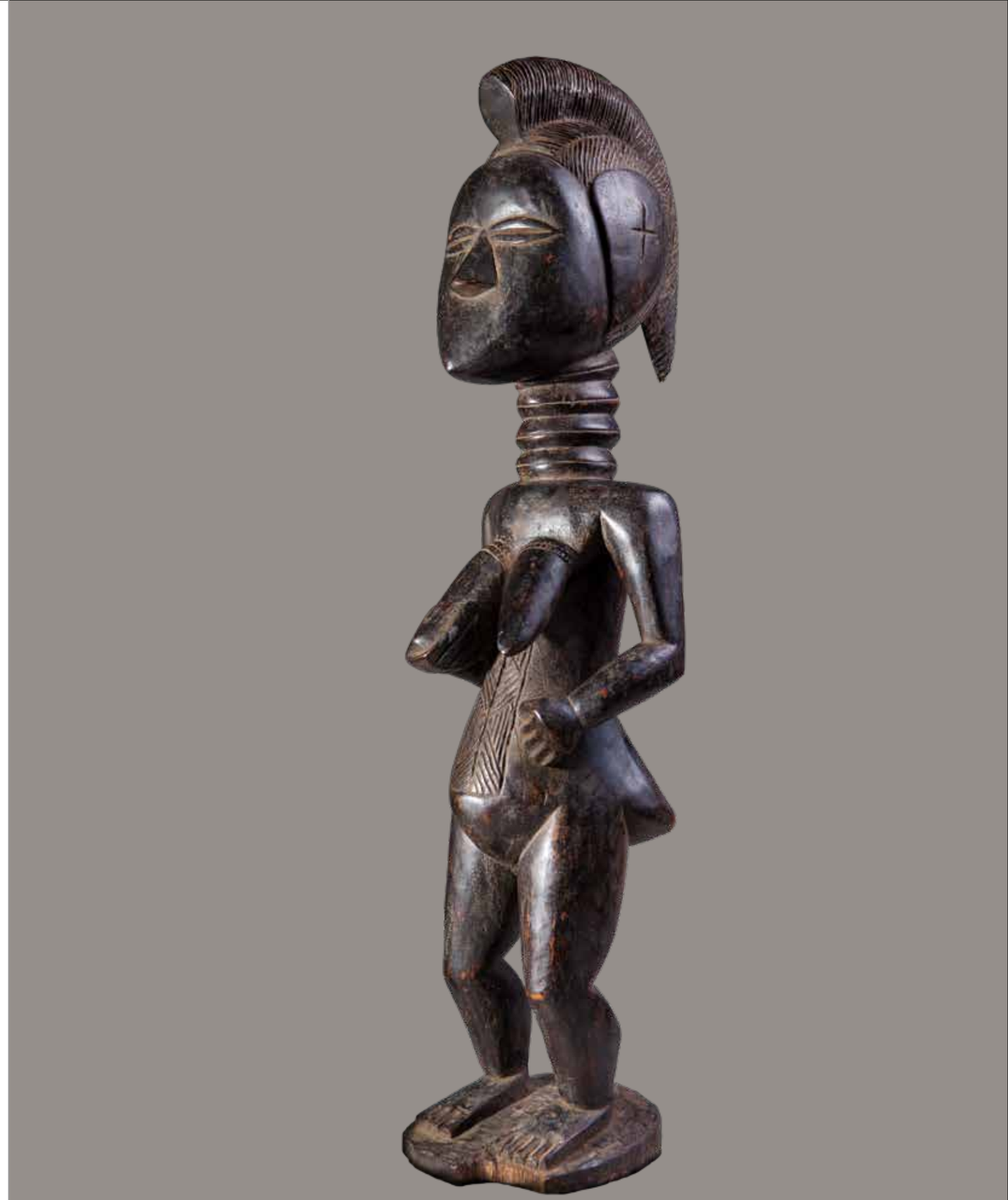
Private divination figure. The loop atop the figure's head was designed to be threaded with palm leaves, a symbol of purity.

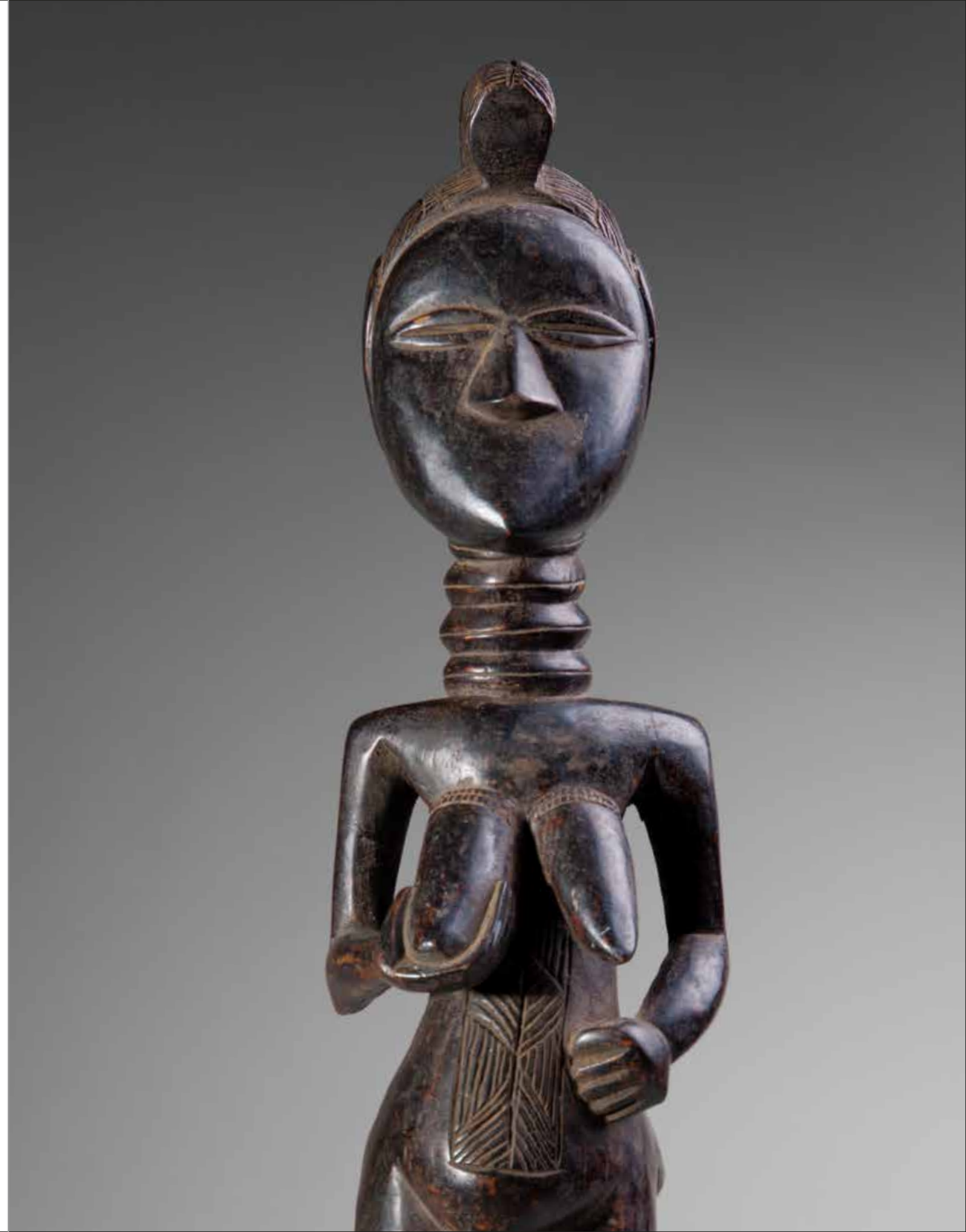


11 **Women association power figure**

Temne people, Sierra Leone
Early twentieth century
64x16x14

Women association divination figure.
The absence of the mouth relates to the members' oath of secrecy.

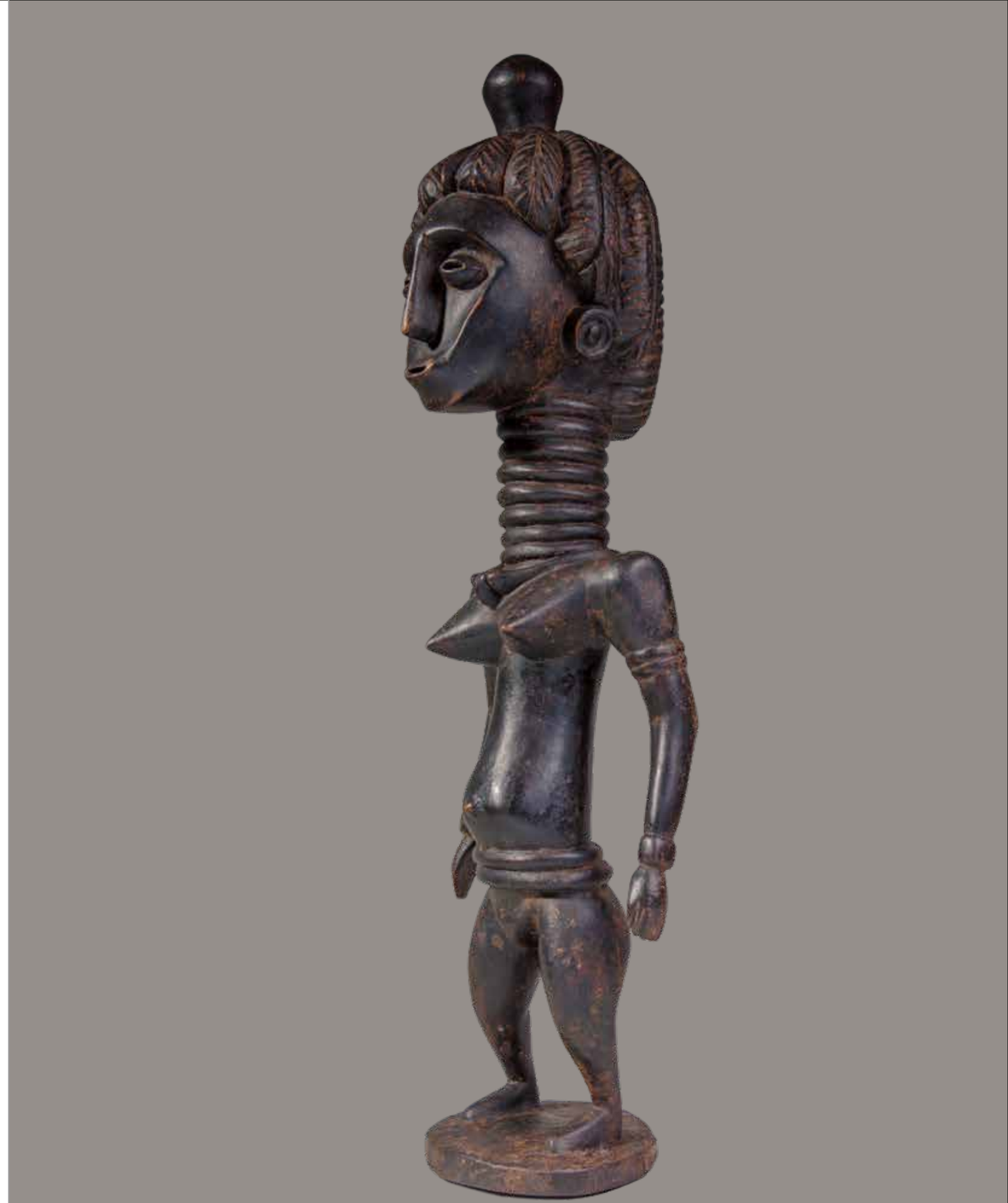




12 **Personal divination figure**

Temne people, Sierra Leone
1961
66x19x18

Private divination figure. The hoop atop the figure's head was designed to tie palm leaves, a symbol of purity. The elongated coiled neck emphasizes the figure's idyllic beauty.



13

Headdress
(Ci Wara)

Bamana people, Baugouni region, Mali
1920
85x22

Composed of three vertical superimposed registers, each featuring a different animal: aardvark, pangolin and a roan antelope.
The composition's zigzag pattern suggests a blot of lightning.

Right photo: Munster Ashendorff, 1910.

14 **Mask**

Bamana people, Mali
Early twentieth century
Wood, feathers, leather, pigmentation
30x14x7

לאלכס תיקון
רקע

15 **Mask**

Bamana people, Mali
Early twentieth century
Wood, leather, fabric, shells, animal fangs, pigmentation
34x15x9

16

Headdress
(Ci Wara, N'gonzun Koun)

Bamana people, Baugouni region, Mali
1927
33x55

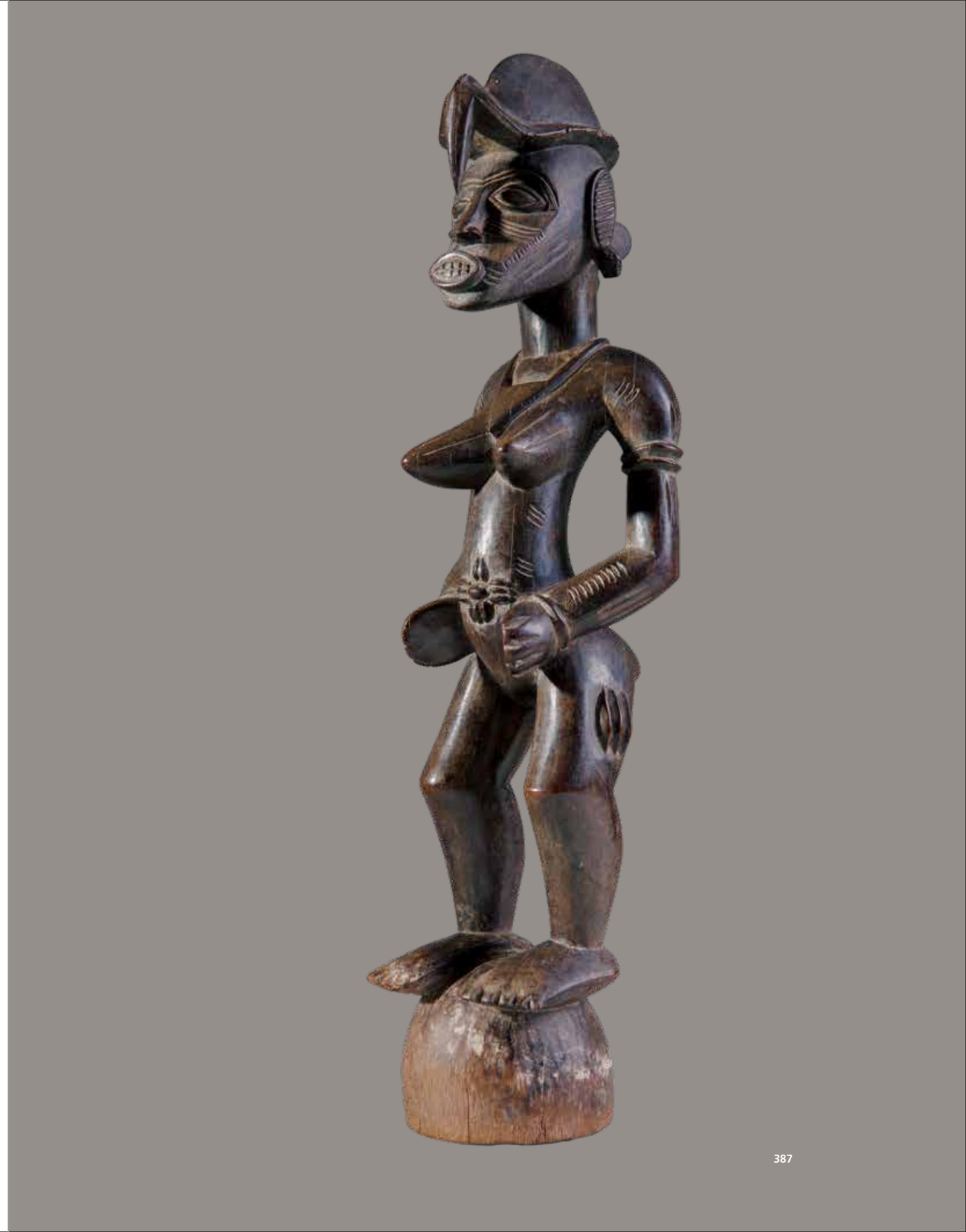
Carved from two separate units joined together at the neck by a collar, emphasizing the two distinct animals composing the new whole: the roan antelope and the aardvark. The male figure clinging desperately to the antelope head, further accentuates the creature's speed.

17 **Youth plowing competition prize**

Senufo people, Mali
1915
41x10x9

Senufo's female champion cultivator's prize.

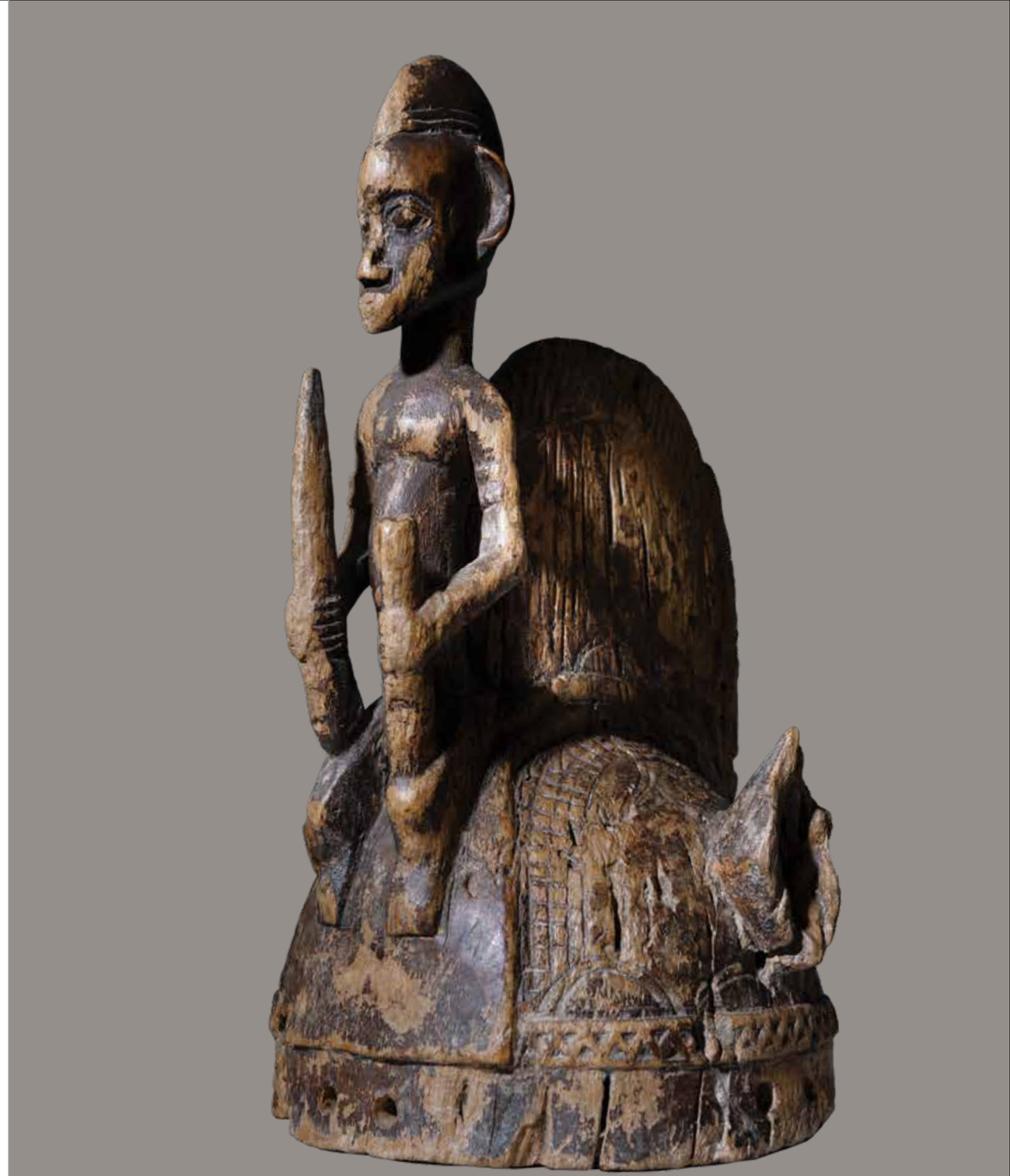
Right: Senufo woman. Published in: Himmelheber (Hans), "Negerkunst und Negerkünstler", Braunschweig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1960.



18 **Trophy Cap**

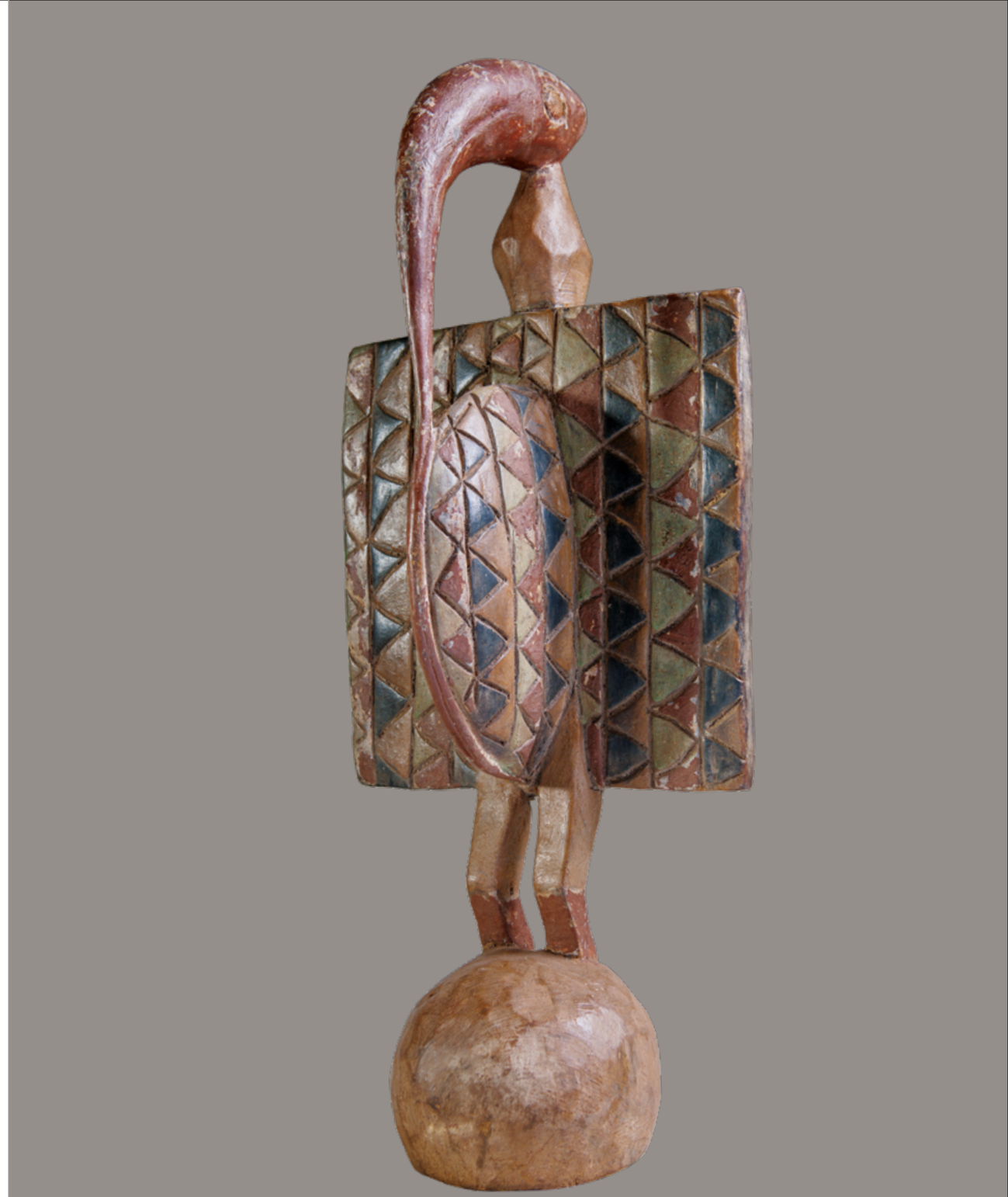
Senufo people, Dabakaha region, Mali
1924
40x24x24

A hewing contest prize. Based on Anita Glaze's investigation, this cap is attirbuted to the Kuelo Workshop in the Dabakaha region. It represents a "trophy cap" of a type awarded to the victor in a contest among young men to see who could draw a furrow in a field with his axe the fastest.



19 **Hoeing contest prize**

Senufo people, Mali
1927
57x25x18



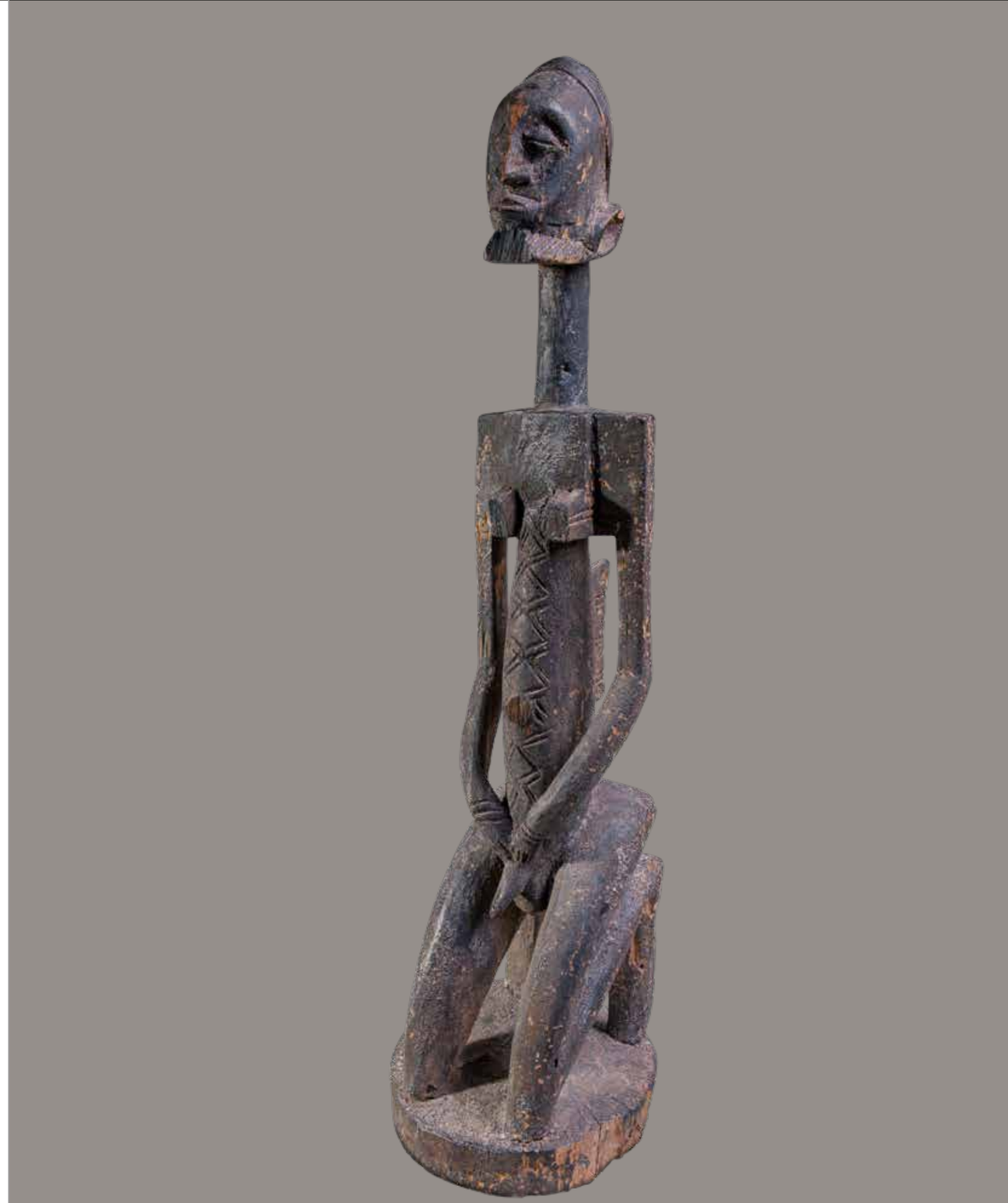
20 **Shrine divination piece**

Dogon people, Mali
1949
46x21x21

Similar piece can be seen in Metropolitan Museum Collection, no. 1978,412,47.

21 **Ancestor figure**

Dogon people, Mali
1941
71x19x17



22 **Container, Dogon**

Dogon people, Goo Koro, Mali
1889
72x27x27

A 130 year old container used during rituals preformed by the Hogons. The horse is a power symbol which equates the Hogons with Nommo, the mythic being that transformed itself to a horse carrying the Dogon's primordial ancestors to earth. Due to its fragile condition an exact copy was created in the late 1960s, and is still being used.

Right photo: Hoop Van Stint, 1981.

23 **Butterfly mask**
(Yehoti)

Bwa people, Burkina Faso
1939
34x194x22

A two meter long horizontal Butterfly mask. The checkerboard polychrome pattern is said to represent the swarms of butterflies appearing before the rainfall.

24 **Mask**

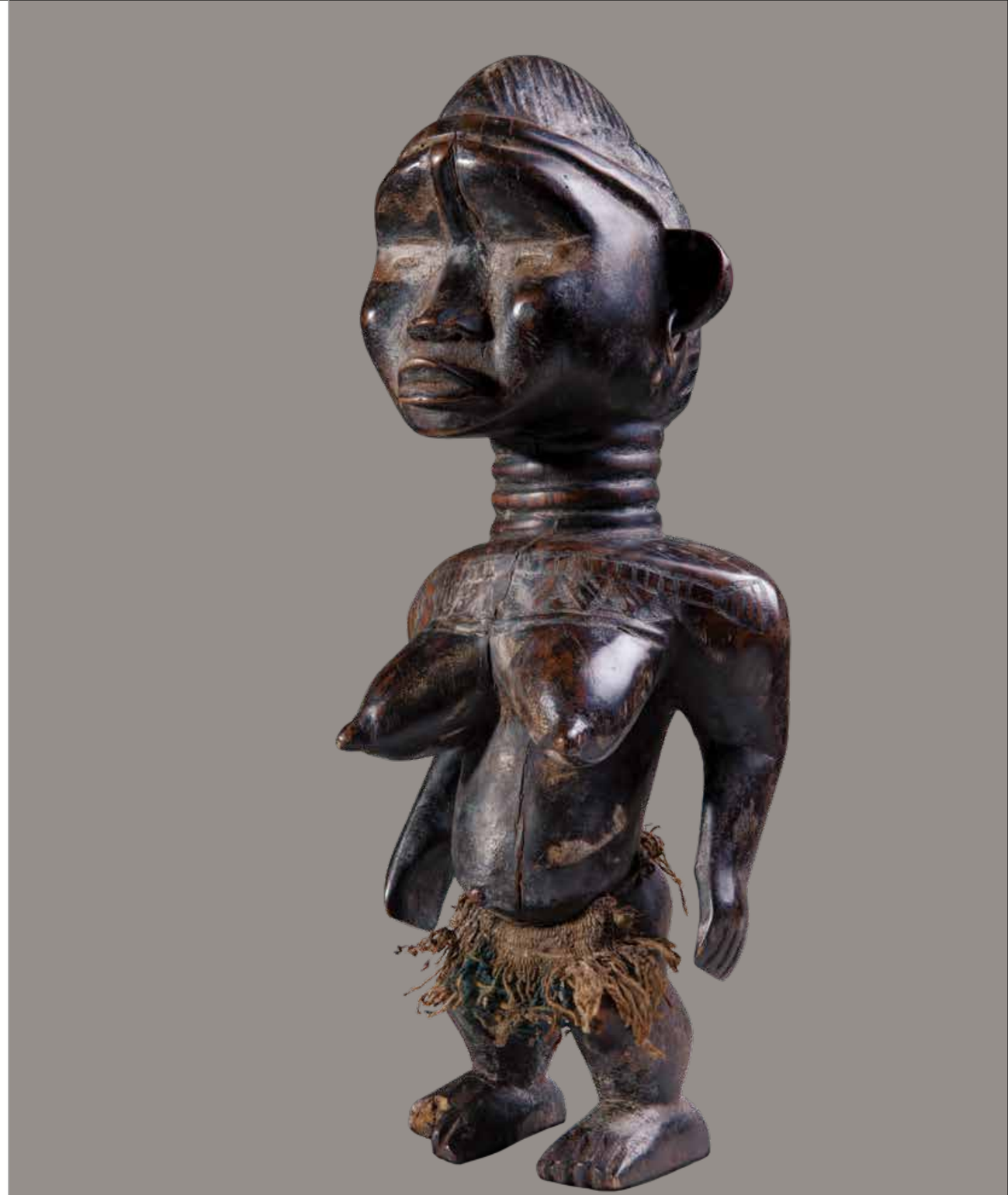
Kpelle people, Liberia
1920
25x18x8

25 **Entertainment mask**

Kpelle people, Liberia
1950
22x16x10

26 **Divination figure**

Kpelle people, Liberia
1950
40x21x18



27

Hunters mask

Kpelle people, Liberia
1927
34x18x14

Hunters mask. A composite of a gazelle and a monkey.

28

Wisdom mask
(Gbona Gla)

We people, Liberia
1915
43x40x17

Gbona Gla, the great mask. The mask of wisdom. This mask usually resides in the Sacred Forest where it renders judgment. It appears in public rarely, and is proceeded with dancers, acolytes, and dignitaries. Regrettably such masks are being offered only when their community no longer exists (Ebola pandemic etc.).

29

Wisdom mask
(Gbona Gla)

We people, Liberia
1935
47x45x20

The mask of wisdom. The most venerated of the We regalia. (Nang Neho), We, Ivory Coast.

30

Wisdom mask
(Gbona Gla)

We people, Liberia
1942
56x40x20

The mask of wisdom. The most venerated of the We regalia.

31

Wisdom mask
(Gbona Gla)

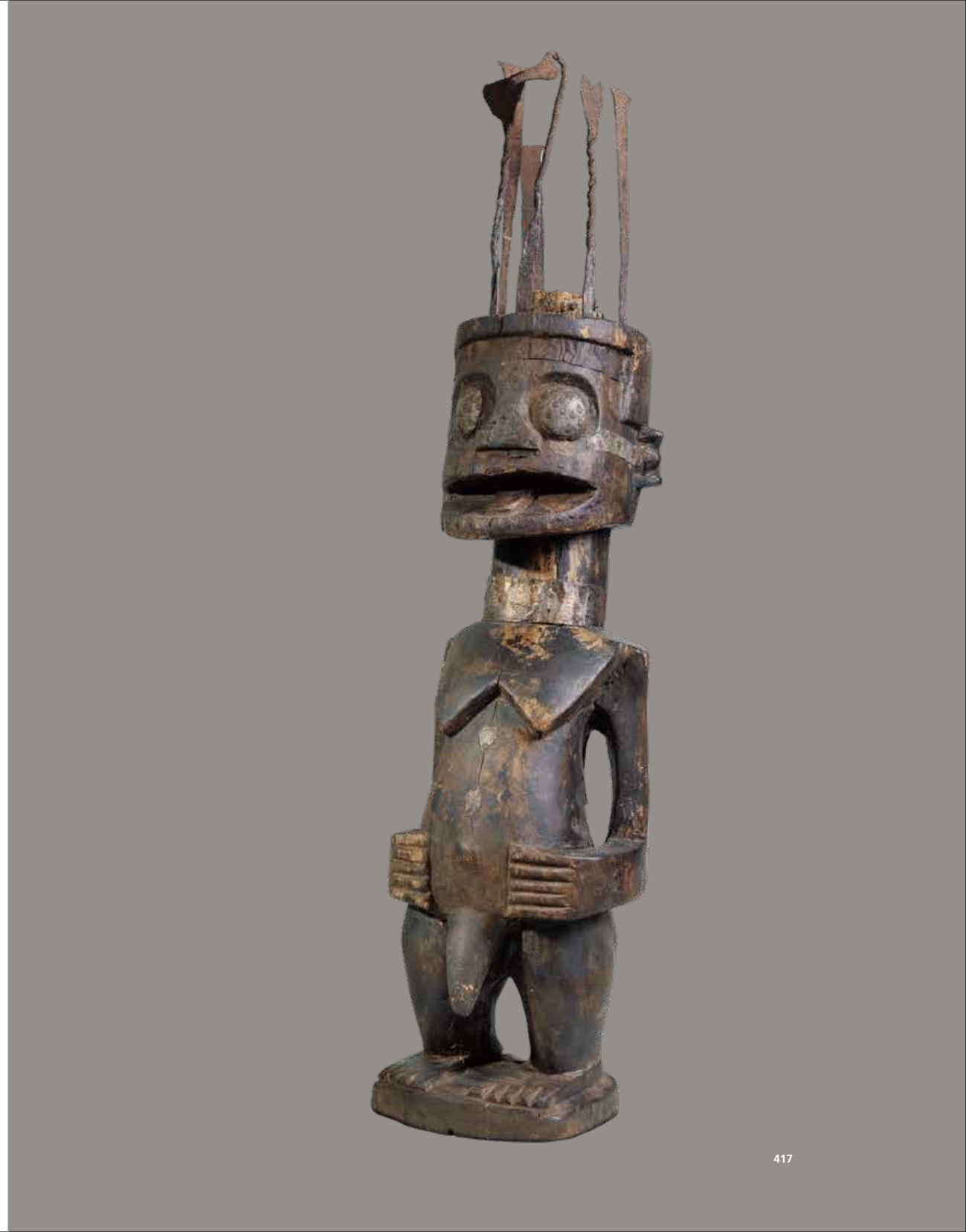
We people, Liberia
1938
35x28x20

The mask of wisdom. The most venerated
of the We regalia.

32 **Divination figure**

Kissi people, Sierra Leone
1924
82x21x21

It's head still contains sealed power substances, and it is adorned with an array of iron Kissi currencies.



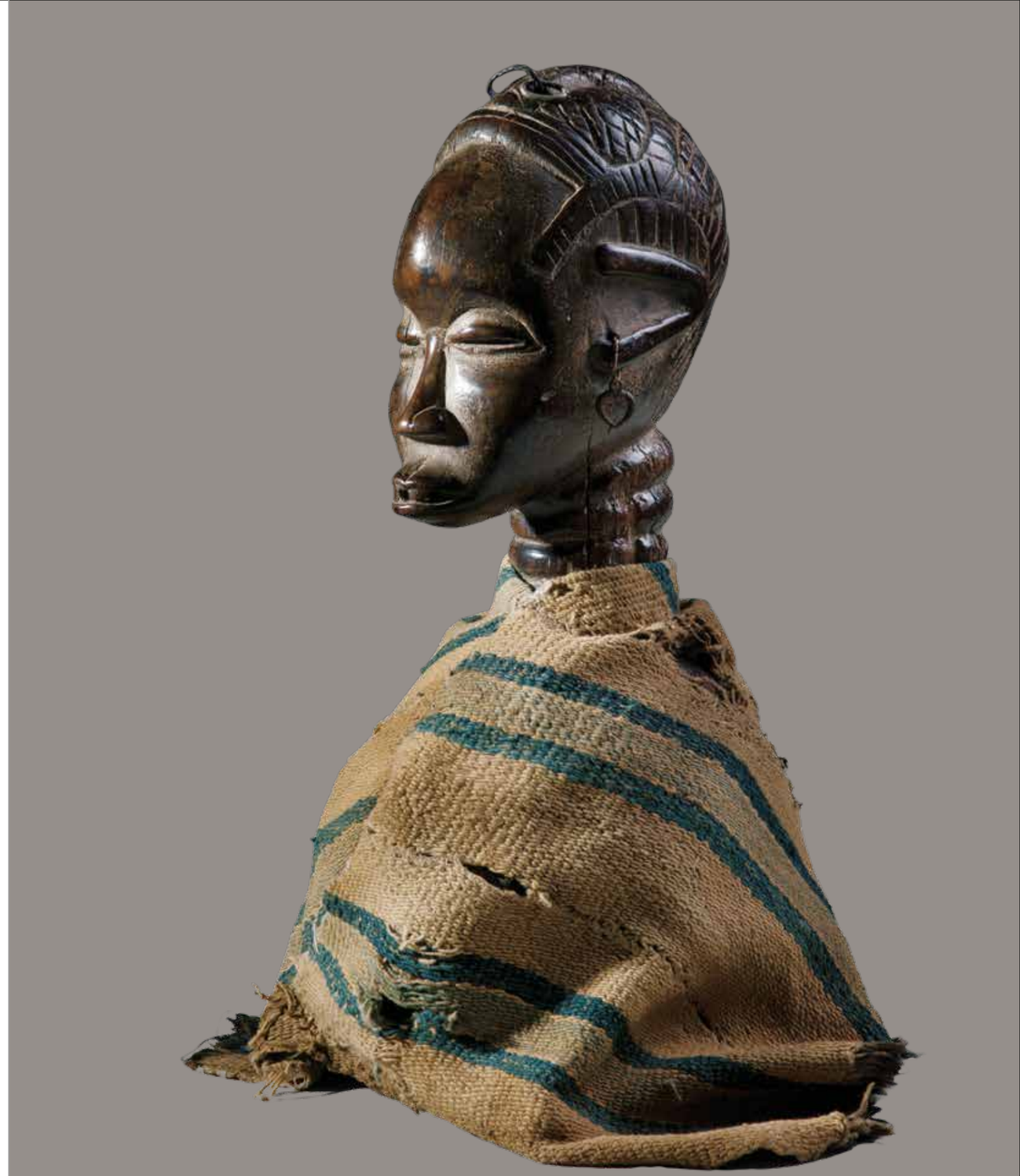
33

Divination figure (Pomodo)

Kissi people, Sierra Leone
1930
35x19x18

Fifteenth century stone Sapi culture divination figures were enclosed in the cavity of the Kissi Pomodo wich was created in the 1930s.

Right: Village of Seiga, Guinea, early 20th century. Photo: R. P. Lacars.



14 cm.

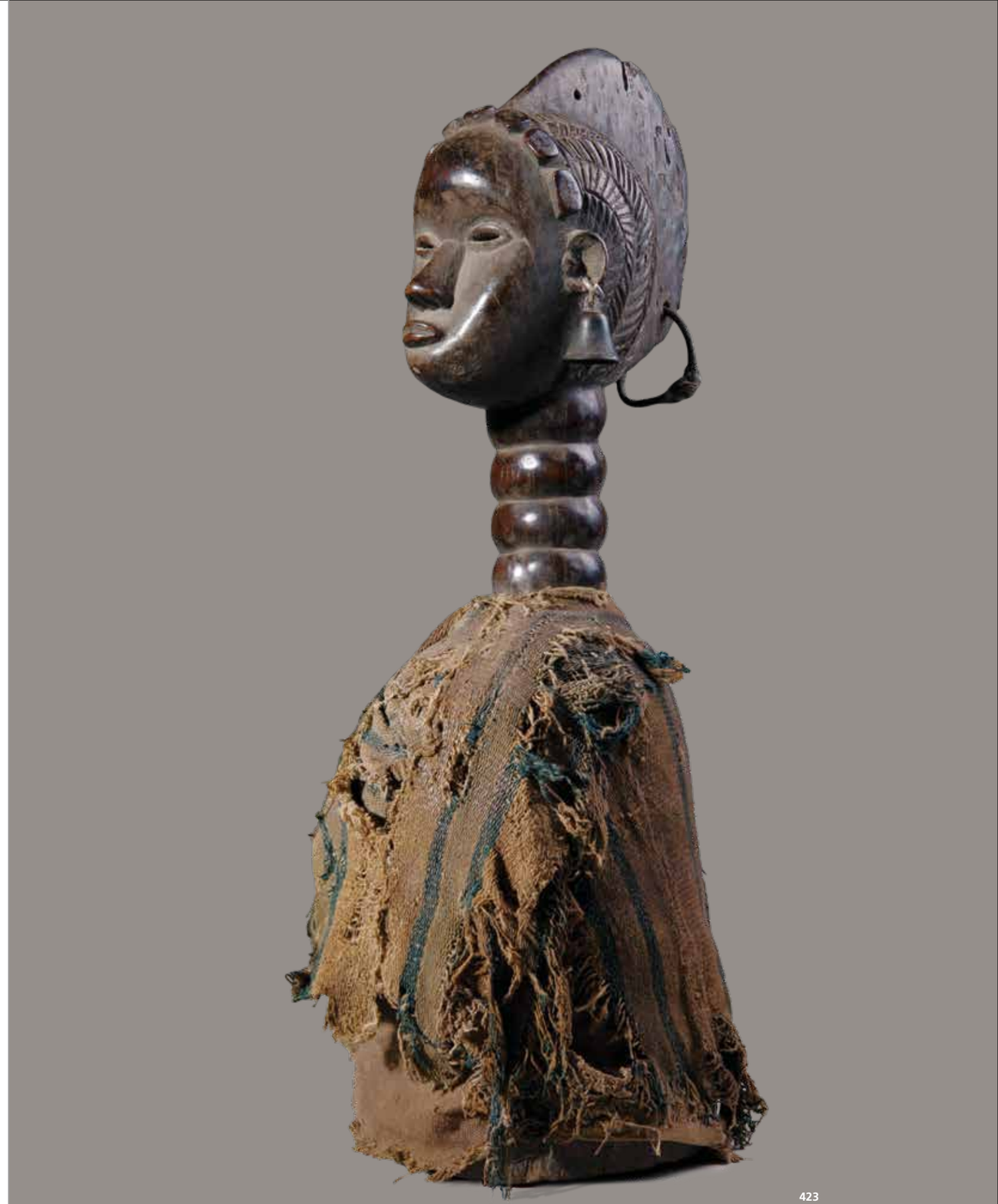
Right: Village of Seiga, Guinea,
early 20th century.
Photo: R. P. Lacars.

34

Divination figure
(Pomodo)

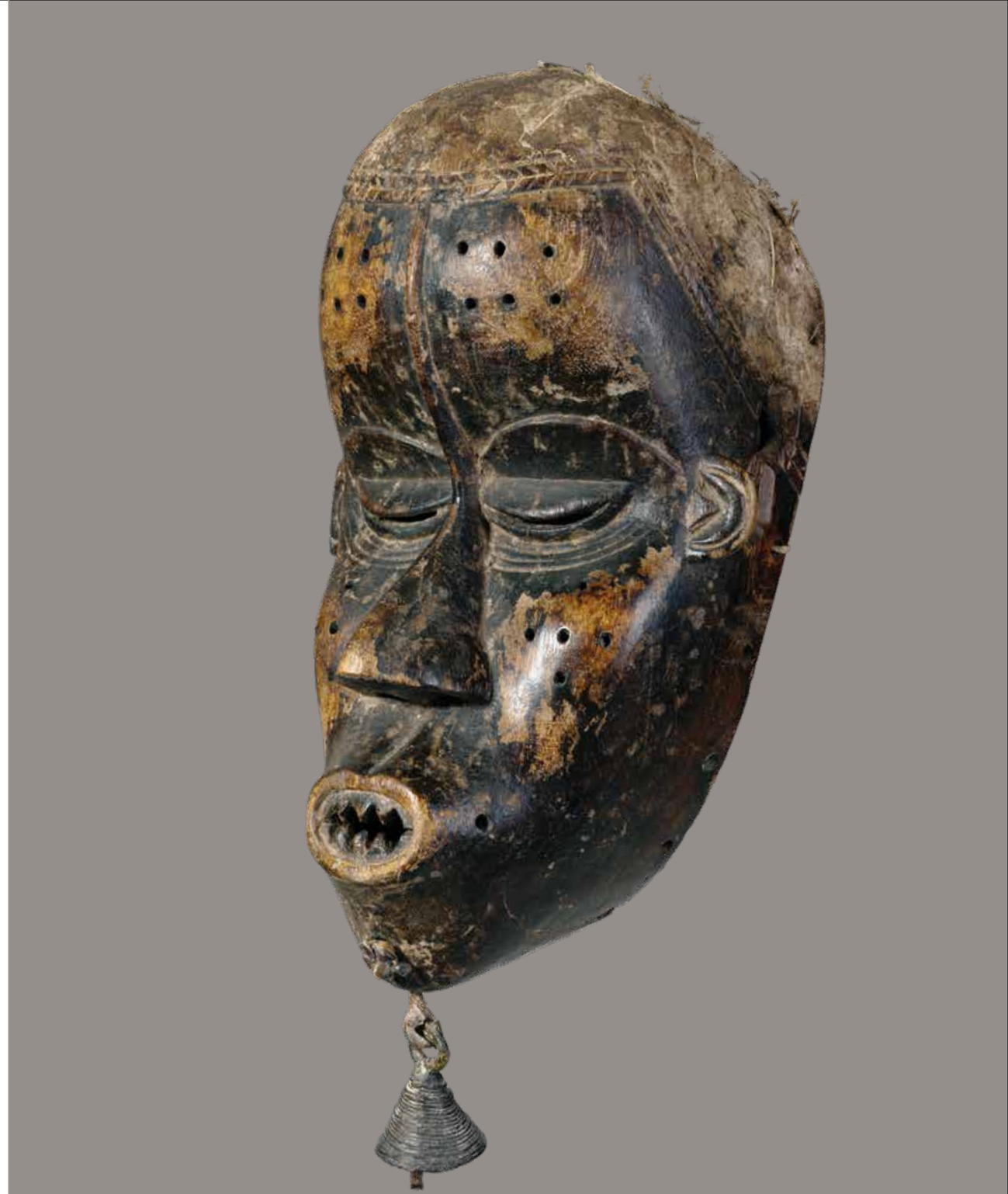
Kissi people, Sierra Leone
1958
63x22x24

Fifteenth century stone Sapi culture divination figures were enclosed in the cavity of the Kissi Pomodo.



35 **Ceremonial mask**

Bete/Guro people, Ivory Coast
1949
35x18x12



36

Mask

Mano people, Liberia
1926
Braided hair, leather
35x18x14

The main difference between the Dan and the Mano mask is the mask's curve in its profile.

37 **Mask**

Mano, Dan people, Liberia
Mid-twentieth century
23x19x10

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38 **Ceremonial mask, Mano**

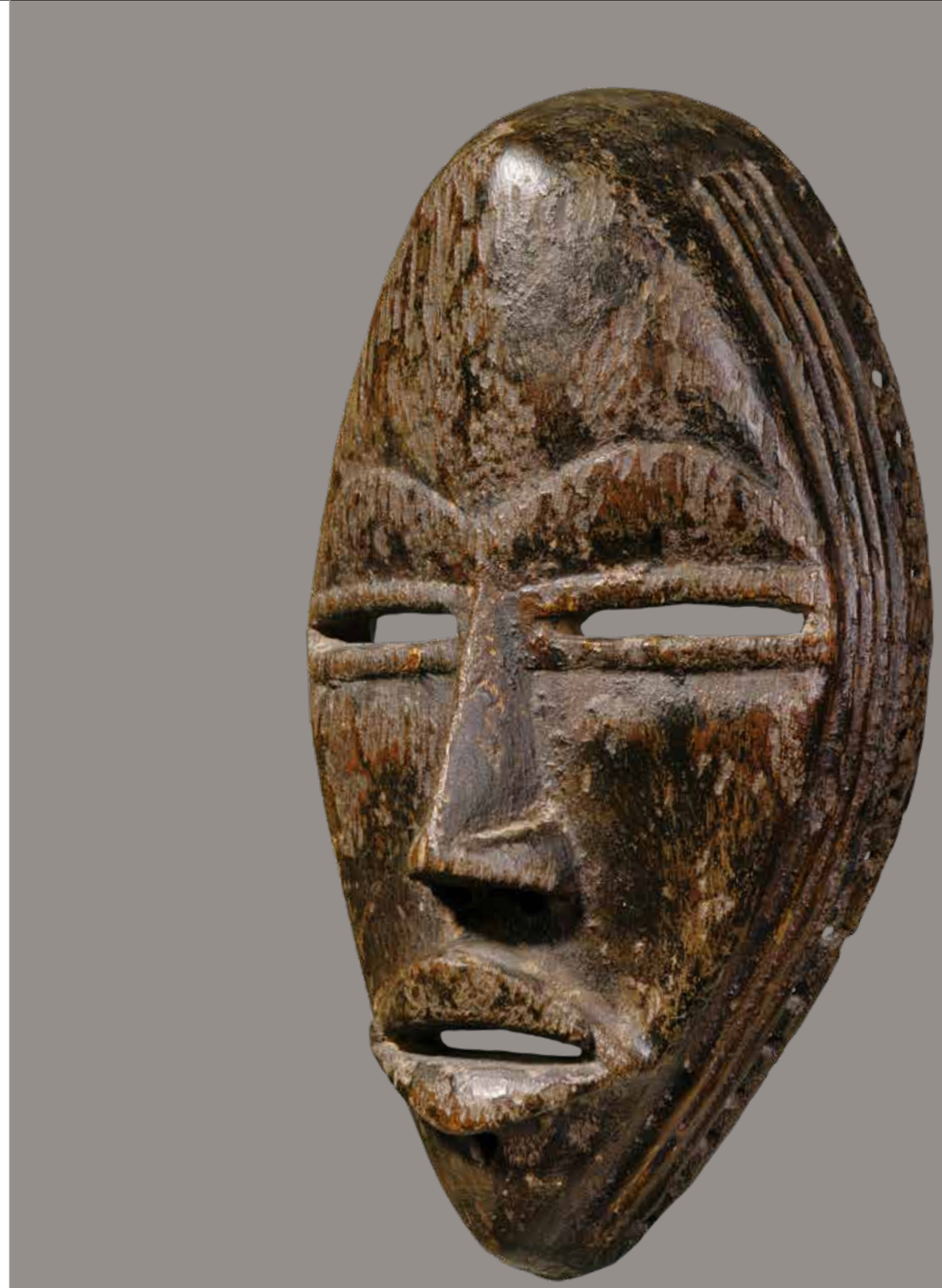
Mano people, Liberia
May be related to the Dan's Gunye, Ge mask
1917
23x19x13

39 **Mask, Dan (Gunyege)**

Dan people, Liberia, Ivory Coast, (Gunyege)
1929
25x16x14

40 **Entertainment mask, Dan (Tankagle)**

Dan people, Liberia, Ivory Coast
Indigenous name, Tankagle
1949
25x15x13



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41 **Entertainment mask (Deangle)**

Dan people, Liberia, Ivory Coast
Indigenous name, Deangle
1924
23x15x6

42 **Entertainment mask**
(Me Fe Ge)

Dan people, Liberia, Ivory Coast
Mid-twentieth century
24x21x12

43 **Hornbill hand mask**

Dan people, Liberia, Ivory Coast
1960
12x9x8

44

Beaked mask
(Gigon)

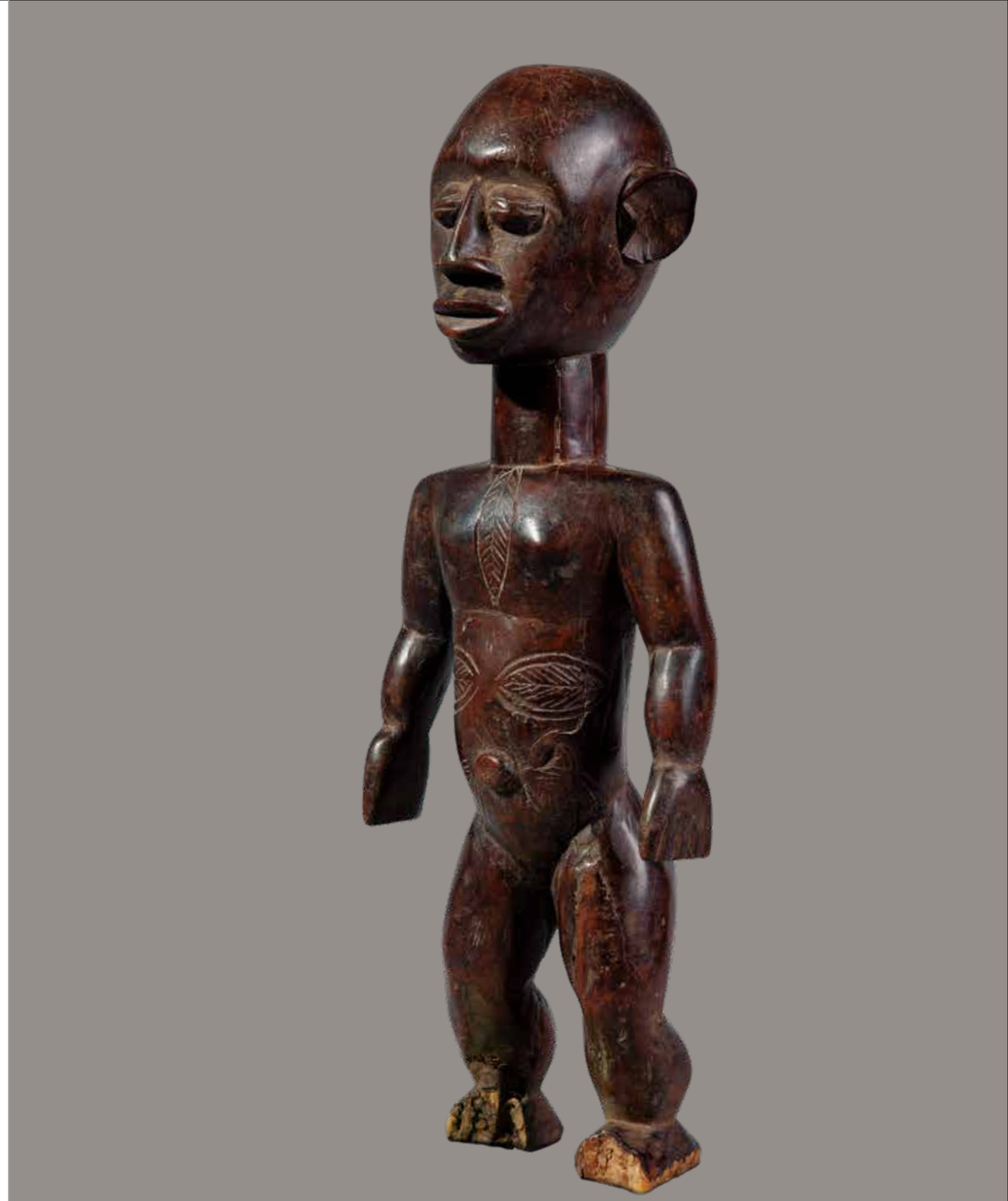
Dan people, Ivory Coast
1932
39x18x14

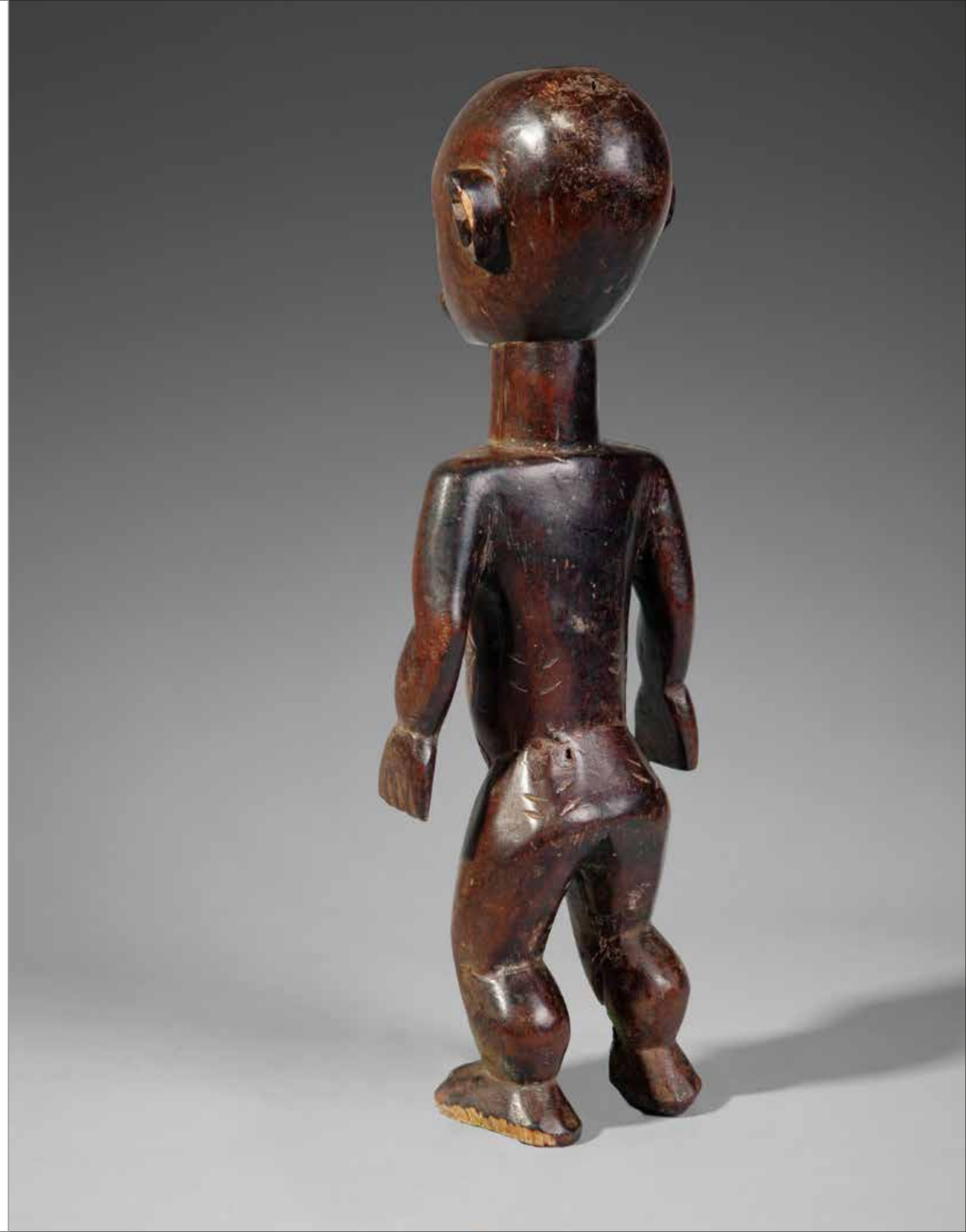
45

Male second wife figure

Dan people, Liberia
1937
33x15x12

Dan male second wife. Leaves tattoo and female genitalia. Male–male sex was common and observed as early as the sixteenth century by the Portuguese, "For they have men in women's apparel, whom they keep among their wives," Batell, 1590.





46

Wife figure
(Lo Me)

Dan people, Liberia
1937
44x13x10

Lo me (wood/person).
An idealized wife. Such idols were commissioned by powerful personages, exhibited with great fanfare, and then kept private.

47

Helmet mask
(Lo'ko' Lmban)

Timini people, Sierra Leone
Yoruba, Wo'dje' society
1916
61x41x32

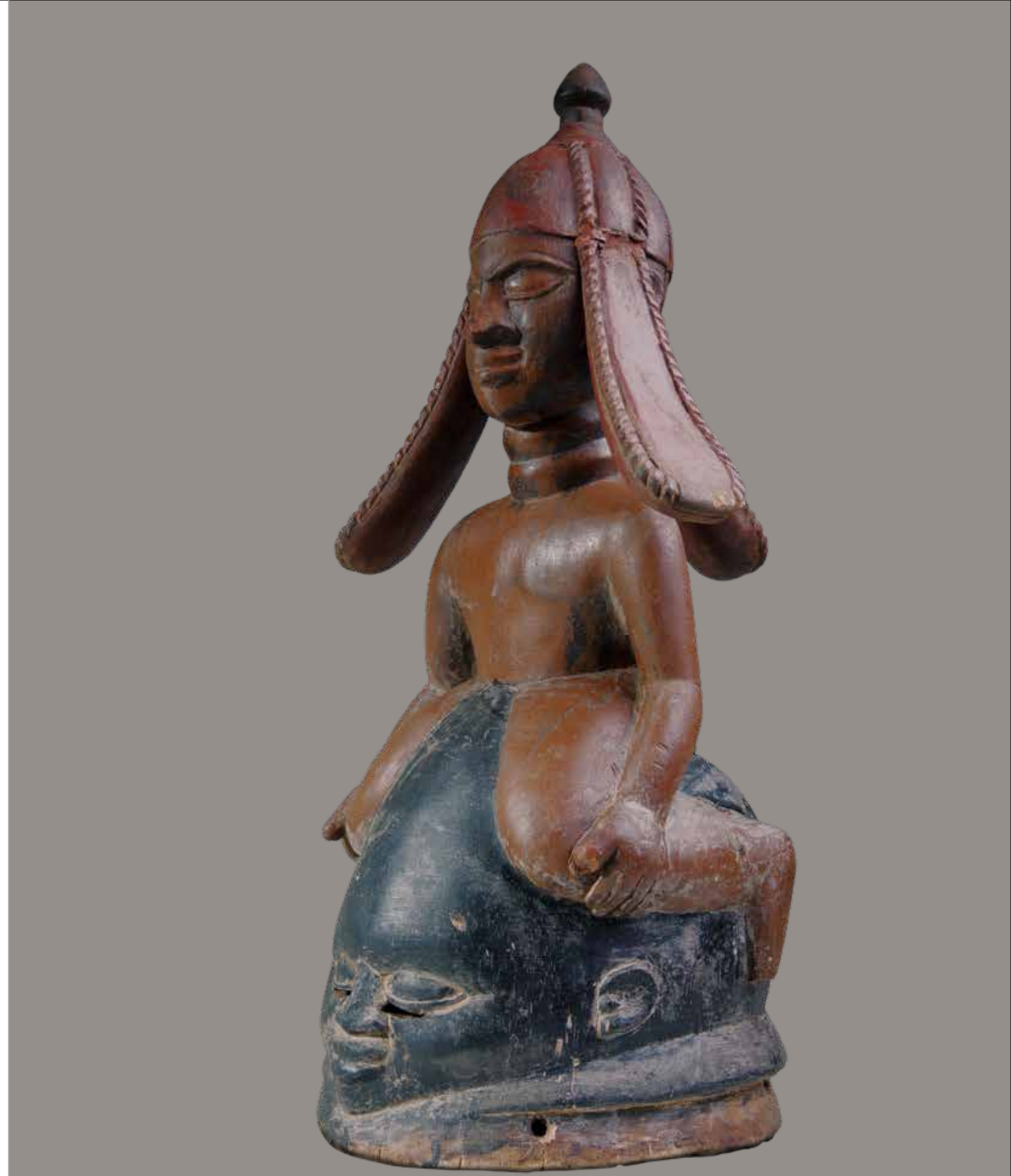
Yoruba culture

48

Helmet mask
(Lo'ko' Lmban)

Timini people, Sierra Leone
Yoruba, Wo'dje' society
1916
60x29x29

Yoruba culture



49

Helmet mask
(Lo'ko' Lmban)

Timini people, Sierra Leone
Yoruba, Wo'dje' society
1916
55x48x42

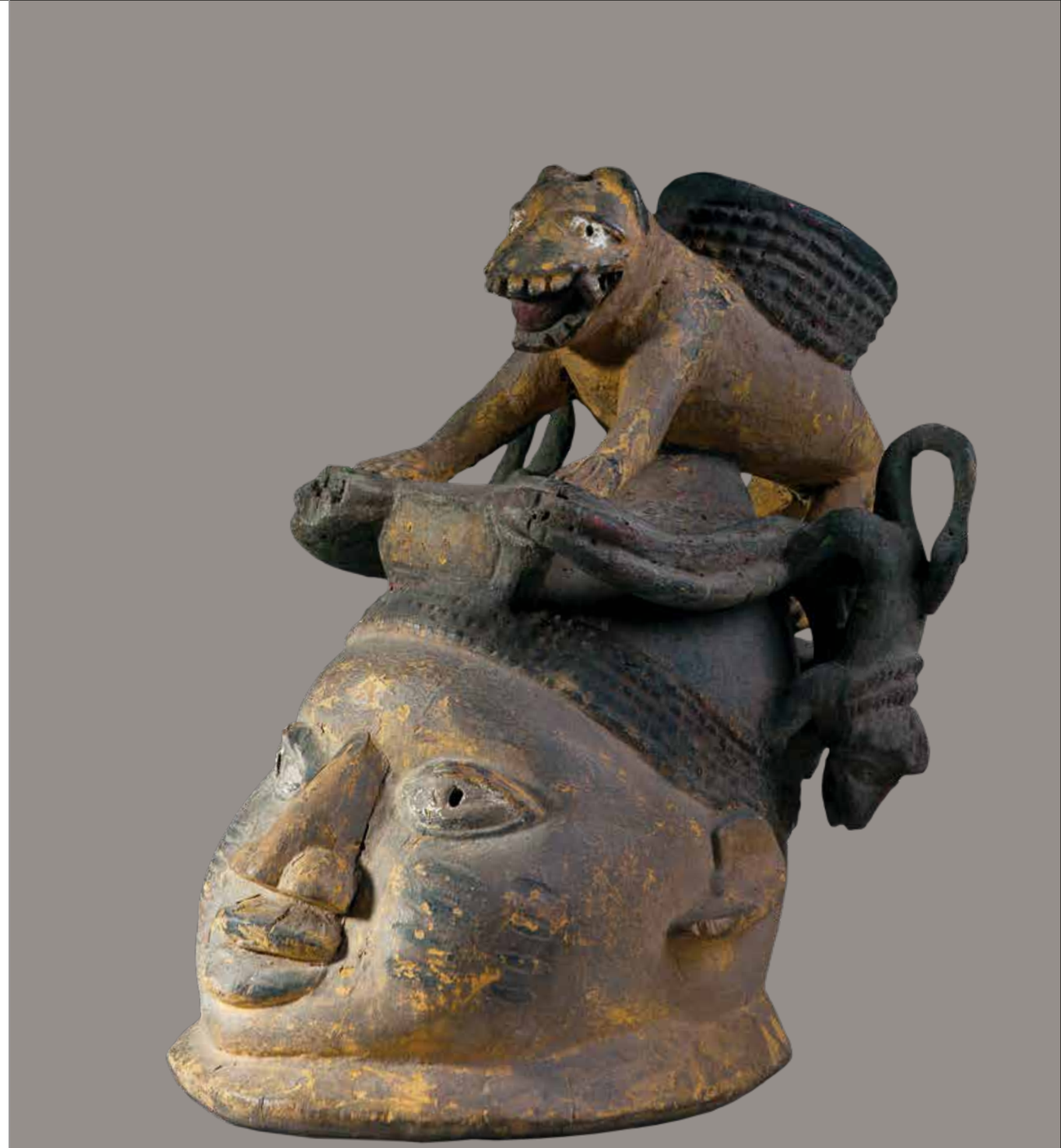
Yoruba culture

50

Helmet mask

Yoruba people, Nigeria
1912
42x32x44

A gelede headdress. Depicting a proverb,
of a lioness chasing chimpanzees.



Birds, Too, Stay Connected

Every night, when it gets dark,
The birds fold up their wings and park
Upon a branch, high up a tree,
Where they will close their eyes to sleep.
Even then, they chirp to their fellows
The cunning eagle, the singing sparrow.
Humans, too, do share this need
To love our friends in faraway trees.

Climbing a Mountain

Listen, small frog:
If you'd like to climb
The giant big mountain
Now is the time

To start! So hop
Up up and away
While you're young and strong
Make no delay.

For as you grow old,
The mountain will loom
Its size will grow bigger
And the path will be doomed.

So get going, small frog,
Hop up and away!
You'll find yourself peaking
New places each day.

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Museum of Islamic and Near Easter Cultures, Be’er Sheva

MUZA Eretz Israel Museum Tel Aviv

Tel Aviv Museum of Art

לקבל מדוריאן קובץ איכותי

Text from Dorit Shafir
Senior curator of African and Oceanic Art,
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Text from Dorit Shafir
Senior curator of African and Oceanic Art,
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Dorit Shafir
Senior curator of African and Oceanic Art,
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem
The Edmond and Lily Safra Fine arts wing

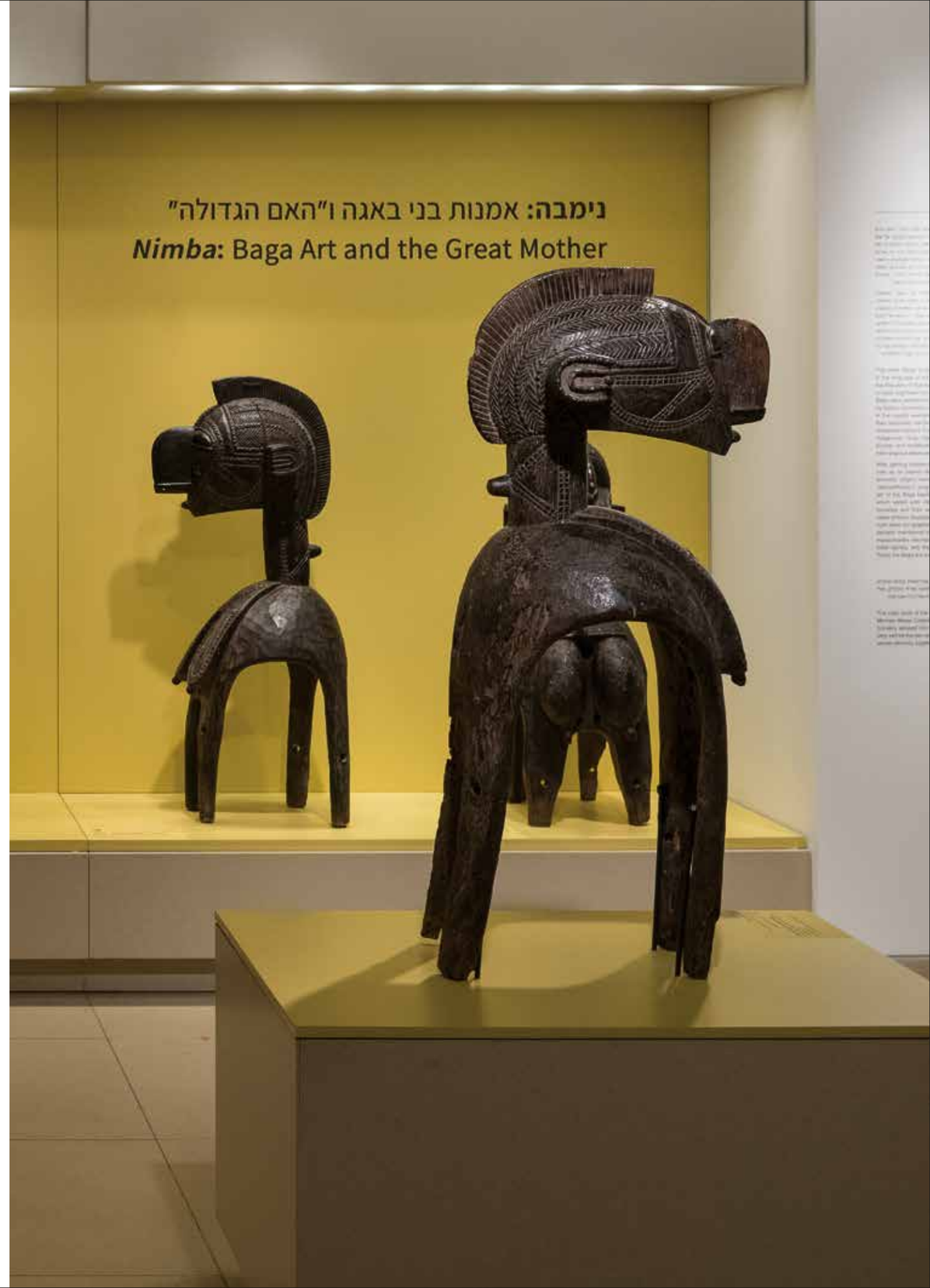
Nimba, Baga Art and the Great Mother

December 2019 – February 2022
Curated by Dorit Shafir, senior curator of African and Oceanic Art.

The exhibition presented a comprehensive view of the art and paraphernalia of the Baga people from Guinea, with works from the Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art, and the Israel museum collections, featuring eleven master works from the Katako hoard.

Additional info:
https://www.imj.org.il/en/content/nimba
https://youtu.be/LYj2wDNT7nc

Exhibition Design: Rona Chernika-Zianga
Exhibition Photographs: Eli Posner




נימבה: אמנות בני באגה ו"האם הגדולה"
Nimba: Baga Art and the Great Mother


נימבה: אמנות בני באגה ו"האם הגדולה"
Nimba: Baga Art and the Great Mother


נימבה: אמנות בני באגה ו"האם הגדולה"
Nimba: Baga Art and the Great Mother


Baga Art and the Great Mother
Nimba: Baga Art and the Great Mother

Museum of Islamic and Near Eastern Cultures
Be'er Sheva

Gold Road Encounters

August 2021 – September 2022
Curated by Dr. Sharon Laor-Sirak.

The exhibition "Gold road encounters" presented the Engagement between West African religions and cultures and Islam, and displays objects that tell the story of the gold trade through which Islam reached West Africa, linking religions and customs.

Additional info:
https://youtu.be/E3t7P6P7gO4

Exhibition Design: Michael Weiss
Exhibition Photographs: Dorian Gottlieb

MUZA
Eretz Israel Museum Tel Aviv

Art of the Enchantment

July 2022 – September 2022
Curated by Dr. Debby Hershman,
MUZA's Chief Curator.

"Art of the Enchantment" was a multidisciplinary exhibition featuring installations, performances, and "power objects" created by international artists such as Ernesto Neto, El Anatsui, and Dana Claxton, whose work is inspired by ancient rituals and tribal traditions. Displayed alongside devotional paraphernalia and art by the Baga masters from Guinea. The exhibition showcased works by renowned masters who operated in the Guinean Katako cultural hub during the first half of the last century, featuring statues from Henriette Conté's estate – Guinea's First Lady from 1984 to 2008 – works never before seen in Western museums.

Exhibition Design: Hanan De-Lange
Exhibition Photographs: Dorian Gottlieb, Eli Posner (p. 486, pp. 488-489)

לקבל מדוריאן
קובץ איכותי

Tel Aviv Museum of Art

My Name Is Maryan

December 2022 – May 2023
Curated by Noa Rosenberg and Alison Gingers.

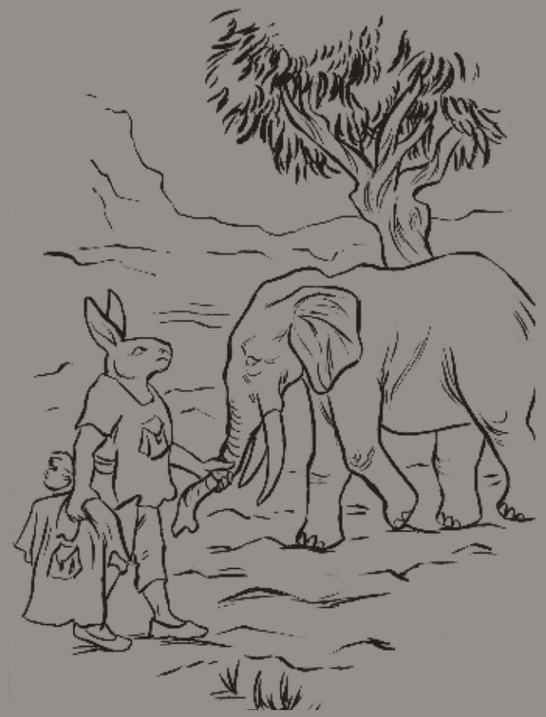
A joint exhibition by MOCA Miami and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, presenting the life and art of Maryan, a Polish Holocaust survivor born as Pinkas Bursztyn, whose studio in New York's renowned Chelsea Hotel was filled with haunting West African art, and for its reconstruction thirteen works from the Dina & Michael Weiss Collection of African Art were loaned.

Exhibition Design: Oren Sagiv
Exhibition Photographs: Dorian Gottlieb

Marian at his Chelsea hotel studio in Manhattan, Via Venus over Manhattan, New York. Photo: Kenny Schneider.

שמי
הוא
מריאן

Dressing an Elephant



If you come out and say
To all of your friends,
“I can clothe elephants!”
Be sure it ends

By dressing the elephants
And you won’t be defamed:
Deliver on your words
To ensure a good name.

But if it turns out
The project’s a bust
They’ll call you a fraud
Unworthy of trust.

Use your words to dream
To dress elephants, too
But it’s more important
That your promises come
true.

One Fish Is Worth More than a River

Don’t be tempted. Don’t ignore
The fish in your hands
When you’re wanting for more.

For even when fish fill up the stream,
A sure dollar is more
Than a million-dollar dream.

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Michael Weiss
Born in 1958, lives and works in Tel Aviv. Studied medicine and architecture, recipient of numerous international architectural prizes and distinctions. Among his best-known built projects are DPK office center located adjacent to metro park cultura in Moscow, and the Israeli prime minister's private residence in Cesaria. Since 2009, the study and promotion of Baga material and immaterial culture are his main passion, culminating in four museum exhibitions, an interactive site and this volume.

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Born in 1967 lives in Conakry. Studied art and craft in Can Can. Mr. Kouroma was master Nkai's main disciple with whom he traveled extensively in the Guinean hinterland forming extensive networks and relations with community leaders, artists and collectors. Since 2009 collaborated with architect Michael Weiss and helped to form the D&MW collection.

Dorian Gottlieb
Dan Gershuni, Studio tren D, maps
Noa Peled, proverbs' illustrations post productionDr. Hagit Ben Ziman, retelling of the Baga proverbs Didye Kot, research
Ziman, retelling of the Baga proverbs Didye Kot, researc. Noa Peled, proverbs' illustrations. Noa Peled, proverbs' illustrations. Kot, researc. Noa Peled, proverbs' illustrations. Noa Peled, proverbs' illustrations. Kot, researc. Noa Peled, proverbs' illustrations. Noa Peled, proverbs' illustrations.

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