



UNVERGLEICHLICH KUNST AUS AFRIKA IM BODE-MUSEUM

Berlin, 26 October 2017

WALL TEXTS

Museumsinsel Berlin, Bode-Museum

Beyond Compare: Art from Africa in the Bode Museum

27 October 2017 – 2 June 2019

BEYOND COMPARE

Every visit to a museum is an invitation to compare and interpret the objects that are on exhibit. But what does it mean to compare and contrast them? The closing of the Ethnologisches Museum in preparation for the opening of the Humboldt Forum presents an ideal opportunity for comparison of two major sculpture collections, one from Africa and one from Europe. What until now had been possible only in books or online, can now be done on a large scale with original works of art.

The pairing of works from Africa and Europe reveals their interrelationships, such as their historical contemporaneity, their iconographic and technical similarities, and the common artistic strategies of their creators. The act of comparing and identifying is not neutral, but charged with socially defined prejudices, conventions, and constructions of history: Why is one object “ethnographic”, while another is “art”? What distinguishes a “fetish” from a reliquary?

22 pairs of objects have been placed in the galleries of the Bode Museum. Together with six thematic groupings in the special exhibition hall beneath the museum’s Basilica, they invite visitors to experience works of exceptional importance, but also to ask what connects and what distinguishes them.

1. THE “OTHERS”

“Otherness” lies in the eye of the beholder. At least since the 15th century, when Portuguese sailors reached West Africa, Africans have been “others” for Europeans and vice versa. In their early encounters, Europeans and Africans often saw each other as admirable and fascinating.

But the image of the “other” changed over time. Beginning in the 16th century, slavery exerted a powerful influence on how Europeans saw Africans. It was easier to enslave persons who were “others.” Ideas about “otherness” were not necessarily based in concepts of “race” as a biological category, which only became established in the years after 1800.

Nonetheless, ingrained perceptions of Africans as “others” and ideologies of racial superiority made it easier for Europeans to embark on the colonial division of Africa itself in the 19th century.

DEPICTING THE “OTHERS”

Looking at works of art can help us recognize how Africans and Europeans saw each other. As trade with West Africa grew after 1455, European artists often depicted Africans in their works. Over time, the content and character of those depictions shifted and often took on sinister overtones. About the same time, western African artists also started to include depictions of people from Europe in their works, showing how these aliens were perceived by Africans.

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1.1: Portuguese with Firearm, Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), 17th–18th century, copper alloy, acquired in 1906 from Theodor Glücksmann, III C 20299

Among the works made for the court of Benin were a number of free-standing sculptures of Portuguese soldiers. They show the fascination that the unfamiliar Europeans aroused in Benin. Their weapons and their poses – as though aiming to shoot – suggest that artists from Benin also found Europeans dangerous and violent.

1.2: Allegorical Figure of Madness, Cajus Gabriel Cibber, London (United Kingdom), ca. 1675, terracotta, acquired in 1908 from J. Böhler, Munich, 5540

Cibber's statuette depicts Madness as an African, with muscles and hands tensed, neck twisted, and face contorted. The figure's mouth is open as if to howl, not speak. This figure is a model for a sculpture to adorn the entrance to the Bethlem Royal Hospital in Moorfields (London), better known as Bedlam, a name synonymous with insanity.

1.3: Bust of an African (Belgium or Netherlands), mid-17th century, terracotta, acquired in 1957, 1/57

This bust depicts a man from Africa. The subject's contorted features, short neck, and pained or fearful expression exaggerates his strangeness and otherness. They are qualities that establish the figure as anything but "normal".

1.4: "Moorish" Boy (Southern Germany), second half of the 16th century, ebony, acquired in 1835 for the Kunstkammer, 841

This figure made of ebony, a precious wood that Europeans valued for its rich, dark color, depicts a boy from Africa—probably a slave. It reflects an interplay of delight and curiosity. But the figure also evinces how easy it was for Europeans of wealth and standing to view Africans as objects of visual amusement.

1.5: Mask, Makonde or Mwera (Tanzania), 19th century, wood, resin, plant fiber, acquired in 1907 from Bernhard Perrot, III E 12223

Europeans were not the only "others" depicted in African art. In Tanzania, narrow, hooked noses, like the one on this mask, are considered a characteristic feature of Omani Arabs. East Africa was part of trade and cultural networks that included the Middle East and India.

APPROPRIATING FOREIGNNESS

Works of art from Africa and Europe often depict not only people but also objects from other continents. Foreign objects often take on new meanings when they become established in local contexts. Such appropriations blur the distinctions between what is African and what is European and suggest that the categories themselves are flexible and permeable.

1.6: Altar Group Depicting Oba Ewuakpe, Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), 18th century, copper alloy, acquired in 1898 from Consul Eduard Schmidt, III C 8165

This sculptural group graced a memorial for Oba Ewuakpe, who was

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forced from his throne and made to wear a European helmet. The altar group can be interpreted as an allegory of Oba Ewuakpe's return to power in which the helmet has become a sign of the *oba's* recovery of the throne. Its foreign origins have been assimilated into its local importance.

1.7: Double Figure of Two Men, possibly the base of a drum, Loango Coast (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, pigment, acquired in 1876 from the Deutschen Gesellschaft zur Erforschung Äquatorialafrikas, III C 799

This carving of two men joined at the back mixes attributes that could be considered African and European. Although both figures wear trousers, shoes, and jackets, these garments cannot be seen as solely European. Fashion along the West African coast often reflected exchange with Europe, and styles that started in Europe rapidly found purchase in Africa.

COMMON BELIEFS

Africans and Europeans have shared religious traditions for centuries. Muslims moved to Africa while the Prophet was still alive, and Mark the Evangelist established a bishopric in Alexandria. The history of Christianity in West Africa is more recent. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Portuguese brought priests to Africa who founded local churches. Christian works of art from West Africa often show the reception in African contexts of motifs and forms developed in Europe.

1.8: Crucifixion, Cologne (Germany), 12th century, ivory, acquired in 1901 from the Bogaerde Collection, 2630

This ivory relief depicts the most important event in Christianity: the Crucifixion. The sun and the moon in the upper corners refer to the cosmological dimension of the moment of Christ's death. Ivories such as this were often used to adorn the covers of liturgical books. This one might have been refashioned to serve as part of a triptych for private devotion.

1.9: Christ Between Two Kneeling Figures, Loango Coast (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, ivory, acquired in 1874 from Fritz Klingelhöfer, III C 585

This small African plaque shows Christ as though he were being crucified. It recalls earlier medieval ivory plaques from Europe with the crucifixion. Like other Christian works of art from the Congo, it reveals the depth of the centuries-long cultural and religious exchange between Europeans and Africans.

1.10: Hammock Peg, Vili (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, ivory, acquired in 1906 from Consul Mayer-Puhiera, III C 20536

This ivory peg for a hammock depicts a man wearing a long robe and short cape. The treatment of his facial features, with his broad nose and large eyes, reflects local styles. His clothing resembles a cassock, suggesting that he may be a Catholic priest.

HIERARCHY, INEQUALITY, AND OTHERNESS

The letters from King Nzinga Mbemba of Kongo to John III of Portugal are an important source about the relations between both kingdoms. These were initially friendly, but quickly changed. In 1526 Nzinga Mbemba wrote

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that the Portuguese were destroying trade and enslaving his people. Relations had become marked by stark inequality. The disparity between Africans and Europeans was an important theme for African artists in the centuries that followed.

1.11: Ivory Tusk Carved with Reliefs, Loango Coast (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, ivory, acquired in 1874 during the Deutsche Expedition an die Loango-Küste, III C 429

In the late nineteenth century, artists on the Loango coast carved ivory tusks for sale to Europeans. The images incised into the ivory are arranged in connected scenes. Although they appear innocently folkloric at first glance, many are scenes of violence. The carvings can easily be understood as showing the brutal effects of the European encounter with Africa in the nineteenth century.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE “OTHER”

Photographs can easily be misunderstood as objective. The problem is particularly pressing with ethnographic images. Photographers often coerced their subjects into having their picture taken. Many of the images themselves are fantasies, reflecting the stereotypes and prejudices of the photographers. They present a visual record of the definition of their subjects as “others,” using photography’s aura of objectivity to make their depictions credible.

1.12: *Imvunulo* (Traditional Dress), Nomusa Makhubu, Cape Town (South Africa), 2013, digital print, acquired in 2016, III D 4994

Many of Nomusa Makhubu’s self-portraits take the “objectivity” of ethnographic photography as their point of departure. Makhubu inserts herself into historical photographs by projecting them onto her body and gazing back at her camera. The resulting image raises the question of who has the agency today to determine how she is perceived.

2. AESTHETICS

Around 1900 European modernists declared their independence from earlier aesthetic rules for art. Later generations across the globe have come to accept their stance and its consequences as uncontroversial. Art need not be “pretty”. It need not be made from precious or expensive materials. Its value often lies in the ideas it expresses. But even today, historical works of African artists are often held to outdated, Eurocentric ideas about aesthetics. They are often seen as as poorly carved, crude, or “primitive” in comparison to European works of art. African artists have always sought to express concepts of beauty, value, and power. Their aesthetic preferences have been extraordinarily diverse, and they often diverged sharply from those of their contemporaries in Europe.

“NATURALISM” VS. “ABSTRACTION”

Although categories such as naturalism, abstraction, or expressionism emerged as ways of talking about European art, they can be applied as a thought experiment to works of art from Africa as long as we remember the foreign origins of the terminology. Twentieth-century Europeans often prized vigorously carved “expressionist” African sculptures. But historical

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African sculptures can be compared to works across the entire spectrum of European art.

2.1: Memorial Head of a King or Notable, Ile-Ife (Nigeria), 12th–15th century, terracotta, acquired in 1913 from Leo Frobenius, III C 27530

This head, like others made from bronze or terracotta, probably adorned a memorial altar for a king in the city of Ile-Ife. The extraordinary “naturalism” of sculptures from Ife convinced the Africa enthusiast Leo Frobenius that the mythical Greek city of Atlantis was located off the West African coast. He believed African artists were incapable of making such works without having been influenced by ancient Europeans.

2.2: Animal, Loango Coast, Yombe (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, iron, cloth, snail shells, plant fibers, seeds, acquired in 1905 from Robert Visser, III C 18905

Ritual specialists drove dozens of iron nails into this roughly carved sculpture of an animal. They wrapped it in layer upon layer of interwoven plant fiber, and affixed other effective objects and substances to it. As a result, the animal has been transformed into an abstract product of process-based creation whose sculptural form has become almost irrelevant.

2.3: Memorial Sculpture of a King or Notable, Bangu (Cameroon), 19th century, wood, pigment, acquired in 1907 from Hans Glauning, III C 21058

This figure, on which each cut of the sculptor’s adze is visible, appears to be an Expressionist masterpiece. The comparison would be misleading. The artist had no knowledge of the Expressionist movement. The figure was carved to honor its subject as the embodiment of ideal qualities, such as fierceness, power, and authority.

HYBRID AESTHETICS

Works of African art were often categorized according to “tribe.” But many so-called “tribes” were nothing more than inventions of colonial officials and European scholars, rather than organic expressions of local identity or political organization. Artistic frontiers in Africa, as in Europe, were not limited by language, region, or putative ethnicity. Instead, works of art evince the visions of artists, workshops, and patrons, and they often draw on styles and materials from near and from afar. They mix these elements and can be understood as hybrid objects, rather than pure expressions of “tribal style.”

2.4: Scepter Finial, Chokwe (Angola), mid-19th century, wood, brass tacks, metal, acquired in 1876 from Alexander von Homeyer, III C 778

This scepter finial incorporates materials that came from far beyond the borders of the Chokwe region. The earring of the carved head and the brass tacks along the front are both of European origin. But this finial, with its almost baroque curves, closely recalls the heads of European scepters and heraldic shields.

2.5: Portrait Model of Castulus Fugger vom Reh, Matthes Gebel, Nuremberg (Germany), 1528, Solnhofen stone, acquired in 1918 as a gift of James Simon, 8172

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This carved stone model for a medallion shows a profile likeness of Castulus Fugger vom Reh (1479–1539). This way of portraying a person did not originate in Renaissance Europe, but was based on the ancient Greek tradition of putting likenesses of prominent people on coins and medallions.

2.6: Adam and Eve in Paradise (Southern Germany), mid-16th century, Solnhofen stone, acquired before 1893 as a gift of Sir Charles Robinson, 2094

This masterly relief depicts Adam and Eve at the moment of original sin. The composition, which simplifies that of a woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Elder from 1509, is an example of how artists in Europe easily borrowed from one another to make their works. Dürer's monogram and date were added later.

ONE "TRIBE," MANY STYLES

African artists active within the same local groups or regions, like their European counterparts, often made sculptures that evince a range of styles. The objects shown herefrom the Luba region of what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo show how varied artists' approaches could be, even when they worked within the same aesthetic vocabulary.

2.7: Headrest, Luba-Shakandi (Democratic Republic of the Congo), late 19th century, wood, acquired in 1904 from Leo Frobenius, III C 19987

A kneeling woman with a multi-tiered coiffure is the focus of this extraordinary headrest. In the nineteenth century, fashionable women from some Luba communities styled their hair in elaborate, falling waves. The style was immortalized in a group of exquisite headrests showing off the women's coiffures.

2.8: Ruler's Staff, Luba (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, iron, copper, acquired in 1908 from Leo Frobenius, III C 20012

Different ideas about what was beautiful and important coexisted in African societies. Although this staff was also made by a Luba artist, it reflects different aesthetic demands than the Luba-Shakandi headrest. It emphasizes valuable materials, such as copper and iron. Instead of rhythmic forms, the artist has stressed surface decoration and symmetry.

2.9: Bowstand, Luba (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, iron, glass beads, acquired in 1883 from Hermann von Wissmann, III E 1591

Bowstands were important objects in the collections of Luba rulers. This bowstand conforms to "canonical" ideals of Luba art. It depicts a woman standing serenely, with her hands before her breasts. Her high forehead is perfectly rounded, and her face and body are harmoniously symmetrical.

2.10: Bowstand, Luba (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, iron, acquired in 1908 from Leo Frobenius, III C 20016

This Luba bowstand is extraordinary for the ways it does not conform to the aesthetics of other Luba masterpieces. The woman's face is carved to

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emphasize her markedly slanted eyes, broad nose, and strong lips. The effect achieves a dramatic immediacy unusual for Luba sculpture, which often displays calm strength rather than emotional intensity.

DIFFERENT LANDS, DIFFERENT TASTES

Looking at works of art from Africa and from Europe also reveals how varied ideals of beauty can be. Although one cannot reduce these to expressions of local or group identity neither can local or regional taste and tradition be entirely factored out. Different places have developed different conceptions of what is beautiful. These works illustrate not only how distinctive ideals of beauty can be, but also how aesthetic ideas have come to be seen as typical of local identity.

2.11: Mask, prob. Chibanga or Ndendé gession (Gabun), early 20th century, wood, colours, acquired in 1965 from L. van Bussel, III C 40171

Masks probably representing maidens from the realm of the spirits were widespread in Gabon. Many of them appear strikingly alike: a stark white face with curved, narrowed eyes, high eyebrows, a slender nose, pursed lips, and an elaborate coiffure. The masks are often so similar that they can be said to reflect a local ideal of beauty.

2.12: Saints Margaret and Dorothy, Master of the Altötting Doors, Bavaria (Germany), 1515–20, limewood, acquired in 1907 in Mainz, property of the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein, M 81a, M 81b

The distinctive carving style, with a predilection for concentric drapery curves interrupted by comma-shaped folds, bears witness to this sculptor's dependence on the art of Hans Leinberger, an important sculptor on the threshold of the Renaissance, whose pupil he is often thought to have been. Workshops comprising several individuals produced sculptures in the idiom of the master, which were then marketed as his.

2.13: Portrait Bust of a Young Woman (known as a Princess of Urbino) (Italy), second half of the 15th century, limestone, acquired in 1887 in Vienna, 78

Our twenty-first-century eyes immediately associate the ideal of beauty expressed by this portrait bust with the Italian Renaissance. The proportions of the bust, too, suggest a local ideal: the long, slender neck, oval face, and high forehead were attributes of youthful feminine allure. Yet the sculptor has also imbued his work with a strong individuality through the young woman's strikingly direct gaze.

2.14: Sculptural Portrait of Zan, Kran (Liberia), early 20th century, wood, raffia, cotton, aluminum, acquired in 1936 through Etta Donner, III C 35833

This figure depicts Zan, one of the wives of Chief Krai. Carved while Zan was alive, it is an individual portrait. Although to "outsiders" the portrait might appear stylized and generic, to people who knew Zan—and were conversant in the vocabulary of Kran art—it was probably easily recognizable as her likeness based on the artist's treatment of her face and scarifications.

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MATERIALS AND ARTISTRY

Aesthetics do not develop in a vacuum. Notions of what is beautiful, powerful, or affective are closely tied to other cultural values. They are also informed by the sources from which artists draw. But ideas about beauty are also closely related to the materials that artists use. The most important objects – those that strongly emphasize ideals of beauty – were often fashioned from the most prized materials. Mastering these materials presents specific challenges and enables artists to show off their virtuosity.

2.15: Scene from the Old Testament, Hans Thoman, Memmingen (Germany), ca. 1525, acquired in 1930 as a gift of Dr. H. C. Winkler, 8468

The favored material of southern German sculptors, limewood or linden, is especially suitable for sculpture. The wood lends itself to various carving styles, enabling artists to display not only their technical mastery but also their individuality. The carver of this fragment relies on a system of broad curves to suggest the roundness of forms, despite illogical passages in the rendering of figures in space.

2.16: Saltcellar, Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), 16th century, ivory, transferred in 1890 from the Kunstkammer to the Museum für Völkerkunde, III C 4890 a, b

This saltcellar from the kingdom of Benin appears to reflect the opulence of Portuguese taste around 1500. The carver's ability to render the finest details was only possible because of the physical qualities of ivory, which lends itself to bravura displays of technical mastery. Ivory has been a highly prized material since antiquity, both in Europe and in Africa, where ivory objects were reserved for rulers or notables.

2.17: Mask, Chokwe (Angola), 20th century, wood, plant fibers, clay, metal, glass, acquired in 1992 from Ch.-J. Massar, III C 45043

Masks from Angola often convey notions of female beauty. In contrast to other works in this section, whose artists used materials of particular value to elevate the status of the objects, here it is the extraordinary skill with which ordinary materials have been transformed that sets this mask apart.

2.18: Samson and the Lion (Belgium), 16th century, boxwood, acquired in 1912, property of the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein, M 154

Boxwood takes a particularly long time to grow. Because of its dense cell structure, it was a material of choice for highly refined carvings on a small scale. The artist here has gone to great lengths to render intricate details, such as Samson's wrinkled forehead, the lion's mane, and the veins in the hero's tensed arms and legs.

3. GENDER—OR THE MULTIPLICITY OF THE PERSON

Gender is not a natural category, but a socially constructed one; different ascriptions are constructed by bodily, performative, discursive, and legal practices as well as material and aesthetic ones. Thus, gender constructions differ across social and cultural contexts, and, depending on those,

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involve different economic and political powers as well as different social roles and positions. Besides gender, other categories—for example, age or seniority; political, religious or “ethnic” affiliations; or social status—play a fundamental role in the construction of the person. The following works of art make clear in what differentiated and nuanced ways gender can be constructed in aesthetic practice.

THE COMPOSITE PERSON

Modernity in Europe and North America developed the idea of an autonomous, indivisible, and self-contained individual to whom a fixed, clear “male” or “female” gender was usually assigned. In contrast, in most of the works of art from Africa as well as from Europe discussed here, fluid, ambiguous constructions of the person are found that resist absolute attributions. They reveal instead the complex ways in which different elements or parts are combined in the construction of the person.

3.1: Shrine Madonna, Upper Rhine (Germany), end of the 13th century, poplar, painted, acquired in 1918 as a gift of James Simon, 8035

By opening the image of Mary with the Christ Child one would have seen a Trinity located in the now empty center; this is a depiction of God the Father enthroned, holding the crucified Christ before him, with the dove of the Holy Ghost usually placed between them. The faithful could thus experience how, through Christ becoming flesh in the body of the Virgin Mary and through his sacrifice, the redemption of mankind came into the world.

3.2: *Umasifanisane I (Comparison I)*, Nomusa Makhubu, Cape Town (South Africa), 2013, digital color print, acquired in 2016, III D 4992

The South African artist Nomusa Makhubu criticizes the colonial gaze and its images by projecting historical photographs onto herself and taking new pictures. In *Umasifanisane I*, Makhubu makes visible the mechanisms of power and the forms of discrimination that go hand in hand with processes of gender and “race” constructions, of sexualisation, and of ethnicizing.

RITUALS OF PASSAGE AND GENDER PERFORMANCE

“Men” and “women” are not born but are “made,” whereby social gender roles can change depending on a person’s age. Performative practices, particularly rites of passage such as birth, baptism, the initiation into adulthood, marriage, or burial, serve to lead a person from one state to another. They are often associated with bodily transformations, such as circumcision, the application of decorative scarifications or the birth of a child, which often marks the completion of the adult person.

3.3: Birth of the Virgin, Master of Joachim and Anne (Netherlands), ca. 1450, oak, acquired in 1924, 8333

A wet nurse hands the infant Mary, the future mother of Jesus, to Saint Anne. Anne conceived Mary free of sin, just as Mary did Jesus. Anne and Mary’s mystical experience of the Immaculate Conception was necessary so that Mary, freed from humankind’s original sin, could conceive Jesus, whom Christians worship as the son of God.

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3.4: Mother and Child, Yoruba (Nigeria), early 20th century, wood, acquired in 1912 from Leo Frobenius, III C 27073

Contrary to the Eurocentric assumption that the kneeling position of the mother designates her as submissive in relation to a “masculine” system of rule, her posture shows, instead, that she honors the spiritual world. Among the Yoruba, motherhood is not associated with the “female gender” but rather constructed as an inclusive category, since mothers have “male” and “female” children and therefore are universal representatives of humanity.

3.5: Chief with the Rank of a Leopard, Beena Beele, Luluwa (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, acquired in 1886 from Hermann von Wissmann, III C 3246

This sculpture depicts a chief who achieved the highest initiation rank in the Luluwa hierarchy, namely that of a “leopard”. It was believed that during the initiation ritual for this rank, the chief received the powers of this predator or the ability to transform himself into a leopard: not only might the boundary between “this world” and the “otherworldly” be transcended, but even that between human and animal.

PERFECTION: UN/AMBIGUITY

The idea is found in works of art from Africa as well as Europe that beauty—as external perfection—expresses the inner, that is, spiritual and moral, beauty of persons, things, and other entities. Occasionally, however, the essence of beauty resists clear classification as “male” or “female,” “earthly” or “spiritual.”

3.6: Mask, Punu (Gabon), 19th century, acquired in 1896 from Johann Friedrich Gustav Umlauff, III C 6298

Such masks were worn by men on two- to three-meter-high stilts in a performance called *okuyi*, *mukuyi*, or *mukudj*. The mask cannot be unambiguously identified as “male” or “female.” However, it may from time to time have been inspired by the most beautiful woman in the community, whose beauty transcended into the spiritual world.

3.7: Portrait of a Young Man, Baccio Bandinelli, Florence (Italy), ca. 1540, marble, acquired in 2008 from Tomasso Brothers, 2/2008

This portrayal of ideal male beauty embodies the heroic, masculine ideal of the *vita activa*, the active life in society and war, promoted by male members of the ruling upper class during the Renaissance. This powerful depiction reflects the sculptor’s engagement with antique models as well as with Michelangelo’s influential works such as his *David* sculpture.

3.8: Male Ancestor Figure, Hemba (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, acquired in 1903 from Werner von Grawert, III C 14965

This Hemba ancestor figure impeccably reconciles worldly power, otherworldly spirituality, and the ambiguity of female and male categories. In his beauty and lofty expression the ancestor embodies worldly as well as spiritual perfection. At the same time, the protruding navel emphasizes the importance of the female lineage and its fertility.

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POWER

Many societies in Africa stressed the necessity of melding “female” and “male” categories to maintain a just societal order. One of the sources of power defined as female was the reproductive role of women. Women also played decisive social and political roles: they acted as office holders, advisors to rulers, and as mediators. Vital spiritual and ritual forces were also often ascribed to them. In the Christian art of Europe, a special spiritual role, which exceeded “male” worldly authority, was attributed not only to the Virgin Mary but also to female saints.

3.9: Bowl with Female Figure, Luba (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, acquired in 1904 from Leo Frobenius, III C 19995

The Luba conceived of royal authority as fundamentally “male-female.” The first wife of the king and his sister, as well as female spiritual mediums, played central political and religious roles. Female figures, which—like the one on this bowl— decorated royal insignias and objects, expressed the “female” foundation of the kingdom and its transcending of gender division.

3.10: Ngady Mwaash, Mask, Kuba (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood with red, white, and black paint, raffia cloth, fabric, cowrie shells, glass beads, acquired in 1904 from Leo Frobenius, III C 19633

The female mask embodied the sister of the mythical founder of the Kuba kingdom. In the masked performances, his younger brother, who represented ordinary people, challenged the king for dominion and for the love of their sister. The re-enactment of this incestuous primal conflict expressed the necessity of integrating the “female” into kingship as well as the tension between low and high status.

3.11: Virgin and Child, Strasbourg (France), ca. 1460, boxwood, acquired in 1888 in Cologne, 504

The Virgin Mary, wearing a crown, presents the Christ Child with both hands in front of her. The crowned figure should be understood not only as Christ’s mother, but also as a symbol of the Church, as *mater ecclesiae*. Because, according to Christian beliefs, God’s mercy came to the world through Mary in the form of Jesus Christ, she was awarded a share of his celestial kingdom after they both ascended to heaven.

3.12: Figurine, Bangwa (Cameroon), 19th century, wood, acquired in 1899 from Gustav Conrad, III C 10531

Judging from other sculptures of titled women and men from the Bangwa kingdoms, the figure may depict a royal woman, a wife of a king (*fon*), holding a young prince or princess. The encrusted patina suggests that the statue was used in rituals, including the ceremonies in which new kings were enthroned. The sculpture would thus have ritually strengthened the royal dynasty across generations.

3.13: Holy Margareta, Henrik Douverman, Kalkar/Niederrhein (Germany), c. 1520, oak wood, acquired in 1852 for the Kunstammer, 473

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This sculpture shows the early Christian virgin Margaret emerging from a dragon's mouth, in which the left hem of her dress still hangs. She had already survived unbearable torments inflicted upon her at the behest of the non-Christian rulers of the town. The saint thus triumphs not only over evil, but also over the worldly power of men and the limitations of the human body.

3.14: Power Figure *nkisi nganga ngombo*, Loango (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, brass, iron, glass, cloth, fruit peel, seeds, shells, plant fibers, fur, horn, clay and other, acquired in 1901 from Robert Visser, III C 13621

The purpose of the small kneeling power figure (*nkisi*) was to help pregnant women. The shells, fruit peel, and seeds on its back associate it with water and earth: the realm of women, as opposed to the male domain of the sky. Through the attachment of medicines, the female *nkisi* possesses great power, as also indicated by the comb-like hairstyle, which expresses authority.

3.15: Power Figure *nkisi bansimba*, Loango or Cabinda, Vili (?) (Republic of the Congo or Angola), 19th century, wood, pigments, metal, cloth, acquired in 1904 from Robert Visser, III C 18909

This *nkisi* was probably deployed to assist with the birth of twins, which brought mother and children dangerously close to the world of the spirits. Notable is the identification of the *nkisi* with those who seek help from it. Its hands point to its abdomen, from which two small embryo-like figures emerge. The wrapped medicine bundle from which the figure emerges also provided a remedy, thanks to the powers within it.

COUPLES—ALWAYS GENDERED RELATIONSHIPS?

Couples—like twins—can be found in European as well as African mythology. Relationships among couples are anything but unambiguous. An image of the crowned Virgin Mary singles her out not only as the mother of Jesus, but also as his bride and as a symbol of the Church. Thus European as well as African sculptures embody various types of relationships concurrently and question the validity of static (gender-defined) couple models.

3.16: Ancestor Couple, Dogon (Burkina Faso or Mali), 19th century, wood, cowrie shells, metal, glass beads, acquired in 1909 from Leo Frobenius, III C 26145

Dogon myths explain the origin of humankind with the creation of four androgynous pairs of twins created by the god Amma. These original ancestors provided the Dogon with their most important skills, such as ironworking, weaving, and agriculture. Poise, order, and harmony distinguish the symmetrical ancestral pair, in which a male and a female figure are portrayed as different yet complementary.

3.17: Christ and Saint John Group, Lake Constance region (Germany), ca. 1310, oak with remnants of its original polychromy, in 1920 in Sigmaringen, 7950

The sculpture depicts the young John leaning his head on Christ's chest. The clasping of the right hands comes from depictions of marriages, and

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the main theme of the group is the *unio mystica*, the emotional attachment between Christ and his favorite disciple. In the devotional literature of the Middle Ages, John is compared to a bride; he served the nuns as a model and as a figure with whom they could identify.

4. PROTECTION AND GUIDANCE

A fundamental impulse for human beings is the search for protection, which can take many forms. Some are private, like prayer. Others sources of protection are communal: religious institutions, such as churches or mosques, provide havens in dangerous times. Often the need for guidance in understanding complex situations goes hand in hand with the search for safety. Images can serve as a focus for these quests. They can offer inspiration and comfort, and sometimes even answers to the most fundamental questions. Underlying our interaction with these images is the belief that there are forces beyond the limitations of our physical world. Tapping into them—through veneration or with the help of a specialist—can offer a distinct advantage.

RELIQUARIES AND POWER FIGURES

In Christian Europe, relics—usually the bodily remains of saints or objects that had come into contact with them—were seen to have intercessory powers. In Central Africa, relics of ancestors were often venerated for their protective properties. It was not just relics that had such powers. In the Congo River basin, certain effective substances were placed inside or attached to expressively carved figural containers. The containers with substances are today generally termed “power figures.”

4.1: Reliquary Bust of a Male Saint, Burgundy (?) (France), first half of the 15th century, copper, gilded and enameled, acquired in 1935 from the Figdor Collection, 8501

Reliquary containers were often richly fashioned from precious materials, as befits their sacred contents. Reliquaries also assisted and amplified the power of the relics within them. They intervened in society, promised to help individuals or communities in need and offered them protection against threats. The large, reflective enamel eyes of this saint appeal to its viewers' interests while also warding off those with ill intent.

4.2: Power Figure (*nkisi*), Loango Coast (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, textile, iron, pigments, seeds, , acquired in 1904 from Robert Visser, III C 21519

“Power figures” were effective and often dangerous, able to ward off threats and offer protection. They could also be aggressive and assisted ritual specialists in finding and punishing those who threatened the persons or communities to which they belonged.

4.3: Power Figure (*nkisi*), Cayo, Loango Coast (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, porcelain, clay, textile, animal skin, plant fibers, acquired in 1901 from Robert Visser, III C 13672

Reliquaries, like power figures, were doubly protective: they preserved the powers of their contents and in doing so acted to protect communal inter-

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ests. The striking gaze characteristic of each object in this group epitomizes this dual function.

4.4: Power Figure (*nkisi*), Loango Coast (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, resin, cotton cloth, plant fibers, hide, glass, acquired in 1899 from Robert Visser, III C 10755

The eyes of *nkisi* power figures, some carved in deep relief and others made of mirrored glass or porcelain, communicated their public efficacy and created a powerful visual relationship to the object, which remained in the memory and imagination of those who saw it.

CONTAINING POWER

Protecting relics is also an act of communicating with the viewer. The sculptures in this group address an audience—articulating boundaries, and granting or forbidding access.

4.5: Reliquary Figure (*byeri*), Fang-Ngumba or Fang-Ntumu (Cameroon), 19th century, wood, feathers, brass, iron, bark, acquired in 1904 from Georg Zenker, III C 18066

Because of this *byeri* ensemble's exceptionally complete state, we catch a glimpse of how it might have been experienced in a ritual context. The sculpture is perched atop a bark basket where it sits upright and alert. It is the guardian of its contents, and actively so. Essana Ekwaga of Oyem, Gabon, describes Fang reliquary figures as follows: "Their faces are strong, quiet, and reflective. They are thinking about our problems and how to help us."

4.6: Double-Faced Reliquary Bust of a Female Saint, Tilman Heysacker, known as Krayndunck, Cologne (Germany), end of the 15th century, oak, acquired in 1935 from the Figdor Collection, 8563

This Janus-faced reliquary was intended to be seen from many angles. It may have been carried in processions or placed in the gallery of a church to look at the congregation in the nave below and at people in second-story side aisles. Relics were kept in the cavity in its abdomen and could be seen through the carved tracery.

4.7: Reliquary Bust of a Saint, probably Dominic (Spain), second half of the 16th century, wood and gilding, acquired in 1980, 8743

The relics in this bust were not meant to be seen. The medallion on its chest depicts Saint Dominic with his attributes: a crucifix, a star, and a dog holding a torch in its mouth. The *domini canis* or "Dog of the Lord" was a play on words with Dominicanus, the Latin name for a member of the Dominican Order, which the saint founded.

ENTANGLEMENTS

Shortly after their first encounter with the Portuguese at the end of the fifteenth century, the elite of the Kingdom of Kongo became Christian. In dialogue with European missionaries, the Kongolese faithful developed their own version of Christianity, which became the state religion. Nevertheless, existing religious beliefs and practices persisted. For instance, the Christian concept of holiness was translated with the Kongolese *ukisi*, a term referring generally to forces from the "other world" that could also be

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present in objects. Characteristic products of this transcultural contact zone are the power figures known as *minkisi* (sing. *nkisi*), which Europeans in the region collected during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The addition of active substances (“medicines”) endowed *minkisi* with nonhuman powers; they could mediate between the worlds of the living and of the dead, and performed protective, healing, and judicial functions.

Minkisi are hybrid objects that incorporate European goods (such as textiles, mirrors, and nails) as components of their power as well as elements from the Christian visual repertoire, such as a realistic style and glass windows in their chests, which had been common elements of reliquary busts in Europe since the Middle Ages.

FEELING PROTECTED

Some power figures were fashioned for personal protection or use by ritual specialists (*nganga*). The addition of various materials (“medicines”) makes manifest the individual use and efficacy of each figure. Just the possession of such objects must have been empowering for their owners and in itself probably gave them a feeling of protection. The protective powers of important figures were due not only to the materials that were added to them but also simply because of their appearance, as was the case with reliquaries of Christian saints or with ancestor sculptures from the Congo River basin.

4.8: Power Figure (*nkisi lumweno*), Loango Coast, Vili (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, glass, cotton cloth, velvet, feathers, plant fibers, acquired in 1874 from Fritz Klingelhöfer (Loango expedition), III C 531

A ritual specialist (*nganga*) enhanced this figure’s visual impact by affixing prized textiles, as well as feathers that manifest the aggressive power of birds of prey. The mirror in its abdomen, significantly larger than its head, is a focus of the *nganga*’s work; it was considered to be the eyes of the *nkisi* and allowed it to see into the “otherworld.”

4.9: Power Figure (*nkishi*), Songye (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, cooper, iron, raffia, tooth, horn, acquired in 1883 from Paul Pogge, III C 1855

This Songye power figure, with a tooth mounted at its navel, is much smaller than the others in this case. The tooth and a necklace of nails were medicinal substances known as *bishimba*.

4.10: Power Figure (*nkishi*), Songye-Belanda (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, animal teeth, cowrie shells, horn, raffia, iron, feathers, leather, and other organic substances, acquired in 1887 from Hermann von Wissmann, III C 4256

This figure possesses a wide variety of effective substances, some locally sourced and others, such as copper and cowrie shells, imported.

4.11: Reliquary Bust of Saint Sebastian, Swabia (Germany), ca. 1500, limewood, date of acquisition unknown, SI 20

Relics were the result of immense sacrifice. Often reliquaries show saints experiencing intense pain as a means of demonstrating their power over

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viewers. Saint Sebastian was shown pierced by arrows (now missing). The once full-length figure was cut down and transformed into a reliquary at a later date, possibly in the 18th century.

4.12: Power Figure (*nkisi lumweno*), Loango Coast, Vili (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, glass, porcelain, metal bells, nails, fur, plant fibers, resin, feathers, acquired in 1898 from Robert Visser, III C 8105

The *nkisi lumweno*, whose main function was to hunt witches, speaks to the viewer, but also distances himself from us with his piercing eyes. Like the sculpture of Saint Sebastian, it has a cavity in his abdomen to hold powerful materials. The cavity is covered with a mirror that reflects light and hides its original contents from view.

4.13: Saint James the Greater, Chiemgau (Germany), ca. 1500, arolla pine with later polychromy, gift of James Simon, 1918, 8110

This sculpture is not a protective figure, like a reliquary, but rather a reminder of the benevolent way saints watch over humanity. Saints, their cults, and their legends permeated Western medieval society. They informed interpretations of history, inspired names of people and places, motivated pilgrimages, and were endless sources of inspiration for the creation of images.

4.14: Ancestral Figure, Buli Master, Luba (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, acquired in 1903 from Lieutenant Göring, III C 16999

This moving figure probably represents a specific ancestor of the lineage in the Luba kingdom that commissioned it. But it also illustrates the power and qualities of ancestors in general. Like the sculpture of Saint James, it reminded a community of its shared heritage. Both figures embodied virtues and offered models for viewers to emulate.

4.15: Crucifix, Paris (?) (France), early 14th century, poplar and beechwood, acquired in 1957 from Georges Salmann, 2/57

Perhaps the most important model of virtue and emulation was the crucified Christ, who gave his life for the salvation of humankind. This delicate work may have been made by an artist who usually worked in ivory, for its proportions are similar to contemporary carvings in that material.

4.16: Relief with the Virgin and Child in a Rose Bower, Upper Rhine (Germany), mid-15th century, slate, acquired in Paris in 1893, 2095

The intimacy of much Christian imagery helped devotees understand and interact with holy figures as people. The cropped composition of this relief gives viewers the feeling that they are sharing the same space with Jesus and his mother.

4.17: Man of Sorrows (Spain), 16th century, terracotta with old polychromy, acquired in 1890/91, 1784

By the sixteenth century, Western Christians sought to understand the sacred through a heightened sense of "reality." The bust of the Man of Sorrows invites us to empathize with Jesus on a human level. It provides

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unprecedented access to Christ's physiognomy and suffering at a moment when he seems to surpass the limits of human endurance.

OBJECTS TO BE USED

Emphasis on private devotion in the Middle Ages resulted in the creation of religious objects meant to be used in domestic settings. In addition, touching an object and experiencing its physical qualities directly could also give rise to a sense of protection. Like images of the Madonna, *minkisi* could be produced in series.

4.18: Virgin and Child, Malines (Belgium), ca. 1500, oak with original polychromy, acquired in 1918 as a gift of James Simon, 8074

Sculptures like this Virgin and Child were produced in large quantities, reflecting a popular desire to get closer to holy figures and to have intimate and immersive mystical experiences beyond what church settings and public processions allowed.

4.19: Power Figure (*nkisi*), Loango Coast (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, iron, acquired in 1896 from Robert Visser, III C 6539

Many *minkisi* were fashioned because specific power figures were considered to be especially effective. These objects were valued not only for their ability to establish contact with the "other" (nonhuman) world but also to provide a "real" experience, in the case of *minkisi* because they possessed "real" power.

4.20: Virgin and Child, Hans Peisser, Nuremberg (Germany), ca. 1540, boxwood, acquired in 1912 as a gift of Wilhelm Bode, 7061

The fervor with which individual Christians practiced their faith often took a toll on the objects that aided their devotion. Owners kissed and stroked them repeatedly, wearing away the detailed carvings—as is the case for this relief. As Mary is not an object of veneration in Protestantism, the image was likely made for a patron outside Nuremberg, where the sculptor Peisser worked and which by 1525 had already adopted the Reformation.

4.21: Twin Figure (*ibeji*), Yoruba (Nigeria), 19th/early 20th century, wood, acquired in 1912 from Leo Frobenius, III C 27060

In Yoruba belief, twins share a single soul. When one died, a small figure, called an *ibeji*, was often carved. It was treated as though alive: dressed, fed, rubbed, and cared for. This *ibeji* was not an image; it simultaneously memorialized and embodied the missing twin and brought him or her back into the land of the living.

CIPHERS AND GUIDANCE

Different cultures use ciphers as a means of charting the cosmos or a body of belief. Sometimes they offered guidance. Among the best-known ciphers are mandalas, ritual symbols of the universe found in Hinduism and Buddhism. In contrast to a written text, which is read in a fixed sequence, ciphers allow the eye to move across their surfaces, pausing on one element and then another.

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4.22: Monogram of Jesus and Mary, France (?), early 16th century, poplar, acquired in Munich in 1908, property of the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein, M 102

This relief condenses key tenets of Christian belief in a complex, nonlinear symbolic puzzle. Splayed across the surface is a monogram combining letters from the names of Jesus (IHS in reference to the Greek spelling) and Mary. Figures and objects related to Christ's Passion, as the nails, the ladder and spear for instance, fill the letters. Among the many references one recognizes Christ's apparition to Pope Gregory at Mass (at the lower center) and the four Evangelists, in the corners.

4.23: Lower Half of a Carved Calabash, Yoruba (Nigeria), 19th century, acquired in 1912 from Leo Frobenius, III C 27460

In the Yoruba cosmology, a calabash divided into an upper half and a lower half can be seen as a metaphor for the universe. The upper lid (missing here) represents *orun*, the realm of gods and ancestors, and the lower half *aye*, the physical world of the living. The spherical shape of the gourd reflects the idea that life unfolds in a cyclical fashion. Such refined objects were used both in sacrifices and divination rituals.

4.24: Divination Tray (*opon ifa*), Yoruba (Nigeria), 19th century, wood, acquired in 1912 from Leo Frobenius, III C 27128

The *ifa* divination system offers guidance to members of Yoruba societies seeking to understand and realize their destiny. In an *ifa* divination ritual, a priest repeatedly throws palm nuts and, depending on the resulting configurations, draws signs in the powder on the central field of a tray such as this one. Each of the possible resulting 256 configurations is associated with a verse, which the priest chants and his clients interpret in the context of their situation.

5. PERFORMANCE

In museums sculptures no longer "perform". Hung on walls, placed on pedestals or in display cases, they remain static. Although museums often bestow an aura of "art" on objects and invite visitors to scrutinize them, they are an alien environment for many of the sculptures discussed here. Many works from Africa and Europe featured in performances and were themselves performing actors, usually in ritual contexts, and thus were only rarely visible. In both Africa and Europe, sculptures, masks, and other objects were combined with multisensory, time-specific elements, such as dancing, gestures, prayer and verbalizations, the scent of incense, and music. Viewers were themselves part of the spectacle. It is the sum of all these elements that made performance an art form in its own right— one of the most significant art forms, at least in Africa.

HOW DO OBJECTS PERFORM?

In the twenty-first century, we often think of objects as inanimate. The works in this section are more than mere things. They featured in public or private activities as foci of attention, as tools or props for human actors, or as things that manifested or embodied spiritual beings or metaphysical qualities. They were objects that acted on their users and their environments.

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5.1: Christ Carrying the Cross, Middle Rhineland (Germany), ca. 1440, alabaster, acquired in 1943 from the Fuld Collection, Frankfurt am Main, restituted in 2009, on loan from the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung, 8637

The inscription around the scene exhorts the faithful to ponder Christ's suffering. It reads in translation: "O humankind, see this figure and what God has done for you. For this be thankful. Thus he will give you his heavenly kingdom." The relief is a testament to the intimate use of devotional images in the Middle Ages: the figure of Mary, here supported by John, has been worn away by kisses and caresses.

5.2: Angel from a Holy Sepulcher, Cologne, ca. 1160–80, poplar with original polychromy, acquired in 1904 in Munich, 2969

To the present day, the Easter liturgy contains theatrical elements. The visit of the three Marys to the empty tomb is among the earliest manifestations of Christ's resurrection. In the Middle Ages, the scene could be reenacted with figures placed on an altar that symbolized Christ's tomb. The Cologne angel, a masterpiece of Romanesque sculpture, is about to tell the women that Christ has risen again.

5.3: Stool Carried by Two Ancestors, Buli Master, Luba (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, acquired in 1903 from Werner von Grawert, III C 14966

Such stools, which were among Luba rulers' principal insignia, were not meant to be used as actual seats. Like the Cologne angel, they were kept hidden most of the time and only brought out on the most solemn occasions. A male figure and a female figure, representing ancestors, support the seat of the stool easily on their fingertips – a fitting metaphor for the relationship between the Luba monarchy and the ancestors.

MASKS

The English, German, and French words for "mask" come from the Arabic maskharah, which can be translated as "mockery" or "fool." Such connotations of deceit do not necessarily exist in African contexts. In many African cultures "masks" represent embodied spirits (divinities, ancestors, etc.). Instead of being called "masks," they were referred to by the name of their respective "transcendental" beings. The things that Europeans prized as masks were only part of the masking costumes that embodied these "otherworldly beings."

Europeans often misinterpreted African masks as ritualistic, barbaric, and "superstitious." Museums contributed to the misperception of African masks—and African societies more broadly—as exotic and irrational. Thus, the first exhibition in the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde after World War II in 1946 was titled Exotic Masks and Puppet Shows. Ironically, such exhibitions often turned a blind eye to European masking traditions. Masks have appeared in the Middle East and Europe since prehistoric times in various funerary and theatrical contexts. To present-day Europeans, it is in an unmovable form—as part of architecture—that masks are the most familiar, and this static display could not be further removed from the performative context in which most African masks originally featured.

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5.4: Headdress, Senufo (Côte d'Ivoire), 20th century, painted wood, acquired in 1966 on the art market, III C 41259

This mask combines animal, human, and geometric elements. The central axis is formed by an animal head crowned by antelope horns, on top of which sits, on one side, a woman and, on the other, a hornbill. The mask was probably intended to be worn by members of poro, an association that acted as a governing or regulatory society in areas in West Africa.

5.5: Face Mask, Mano or Dan (Liberia), 20th century, wood, iron, 26 x 17 x 11.5 cm, acquired in 1940 from Etta Donner, III C 36678

This mask with its triangular form, pointed chin, narrow eyes, and parallel lines on its forehead, depicts an ideal of beauty among the Dan or Mano peoples in Liberia. It was probably intended to protect initiates and may embody a forest spirit friendly to humans. The spirit chooses a human partner, to whom it would appear and instruct about the specific manner (the type of mask, the costume, and style of dance) through which it would manifest itself.

5.6: Architectural Bracket with the Mask of a Wild Man, Andreas Schlüter and Workshop, Berlin (Germany), ca. 1704, sandstone, transferred in 1964 from the Museum für Deutsche Geschichte, F 7

Depictions of masks have decorated buildings in Europe at least since the Romanesque era. Often these are grimacing faces as expressions of sin and human vice. The bearded face with bushy eyebrows, wavy hair, and puffed cheeks is that of a "wild man." As an architectural element of the former Berlin City Palace, it embodied the primal forces held in check by the civilizing power of the Prussian monarchy.

5.7: Mabuh Mask, Fungom or Wum (Cameroon), 19th century, wood, plant fibers, acquired in 1910 from the estate of Hans Glauning, III C 24255

This mabuh mask has formal similarities to Schlüter's mask. In this case, however, the bulging eyes, blown-up cheeks, prominent nose, and protruding facial features represent a being in its own right. Along with other masks, mabuh was performed by a secret society, kwifon, and was closely connected to the social and judicial regulation of society.

ORIENTING TIME

Though we are used to seeing performative objects such as masks and altarpieces in museums, in their original contexts they were seldom on view. Masquerades appeared cyclically, or in some instances only after chance events, such as a ruler's death. European liturgical objects were mainly visible at High Mass or on specific feast days. Regulating when these works appeared heightened their impact when they were actually seen, and also linked them inextricably to important moments in the life cycle or calendar year. However „ritualistic“ these works seem to be, there was also a distinctly practical dimension to their performance. In both Africa and Europe, their appearances were connected to livelihood and subsistence, from rain for crops, to popular feast days with burgeoning marketplaces.

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5.8: Private Devotional Shrine (Hausaltärchen) with Saint Anne, the Virgin, and the Child (Anna Selbdritt), Swabia (Germany), dated 1498, limewood and polychromy, recorded in 1859 in the Kunstkammer, 457

This diminutive triptych was probably fashioned for private devotion and would have stood in a home or a private chapel. Most of the time it remained closed, with only paintings of saints visible. When opened by its owner, it became multidimensional, displaying painting and sculpture, and with gold taking pride of place.

5.9: Ekpoki Mask, Ibino or Kwa River (Nigeria), 19th century, wood, acquired in 1904 from Max von Stefenelli, III C 18872

This mask was for the head of the ekpo nyoho association, which in pre-colonial times exercised regulatory powers. Its broad face and articulated lower jaw emphasize its plastic qualities. Its elements alternate between bulging and hard-edged, large and small. The jaw, moving freely as the masker danced and ran, would have highlighted the immediacy of the performance.

TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES

Masquerades often transcended the boundaries of the human and spiritual realms, and provided a setting for rites of passage. In the Christian West, devotional images and objects also straddled the earthly and divine realms. They were often placed at physical thresholds to connect and to separate the sacred and the profane.

5.10: Christ on the Donkey (Palmesel), Swabia (Germany), ca. 1530, limewood with polychromy, acquired in Braunschweig in 1915 as an anonymous gift, 7710

The Palmesel ("palm donkey") is a type of sculpture that, as early as the twelfth century, was processed through the streets of German towns. The processions reenacted of Christ's entry into Jerusalem and metaphorically transformed each town into the "holy city." During the Reformation, palm donkeys were frequent targets of iconoclasm because they were perceived as idols.

5.11: Banda or Kumbaduba Mask, Baga (Guinea), around 1900, wood and pigments, acquired in 1916 from Hermann Rolle, III C 30683

This mask combines attributes of animals from both land and sea. Its jaws are like a crocodile's; its ears like a small mammal's, and its horns like an antelope's. Although together these features resemble a face, the mask was worn on the top of the head. According to 19th-century descriptions, it could fly, swim, and run, testing the limits of its character and its performer.

5.12: Mulwalwa Mask, Kuba (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th–early 20th century, wood and raffia, acquired in 1910 from H. Salomon, III C 26361

This mask embodies a powerful nature spirit. While such masks were usually performed, this example has no holes through which the performer could see. It was probably mounted on a wall at the community's initiation camp. Masks displayed along with other sculptures carved inside the

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camp signaled that the initiation was almost complete and the initiates would soon be reintegrated into society.

5.13: Christ as the Man of Sorrows, Erasmus Grasser, Munich (Germany), ca. 1480/90, limewood, acquired in 1853 in Munich for the Kunstkammer, 382

Erasmus Grasser's double-sided sculpture of Christ marks the threshold between suffering and triumph. Christ solemnly displays the wounds of his Passion. He is also triumphant, standing on an orb with a halo around his head. This work physically marked transitional spaces. It may have used in processions or hung from the ceiling of a church to connect and separate the altar from the rest of the space.

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6. TAKING LEAVE

Death is the inescapable fate of every human being. Cultures deal with this subject in different ways. Even though Christianity believes in resurrection, the death of an individual means bidding farewell: the dying withdraws from the world of the living. By contrast, in several African religions, death does not have the same finality, but, instead, is considered one of a number of transitions in the cycle of life, like birth or coming of age. The relationship of the living with the dead is not only—as in Europe—one of grief and remembrance, but a more active one in which time and resources are invested. The scholar of religion Elias K. Bongmba describes ancestors as “those who have died but continue to maintain a presence among or a relationship with their living relatives.”

PORTRAITS OF TRANSITION

In European art, the transition from life to death is itself a pictorial theme along with the grief of the survivors, both as a reaction and as a public ritual—a subject that is seldom if ever portrayed in works of art from various African religions. By contrast, sculptures in some African cultures facilitate interaction with the world of the dead.

6.1: *keko kia bwelo* Facial Mask, Vili (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood with white, red, and black pigment, animal hair, string, lizard skin, acquired in 1887 from Wilhelm Joest, III C 3906

This mask is punctuated with expressive features—rounded, “open” eyes and a mouth showing bared teeth—that are given visual as well as symbolic and material strength by the black-red-white coloring. This unites the “black” earth—which symbolizes the world of the living—and the “white” light of the world of the dead, with the “red” sphere of blood, danger, and transformation in between. The mask had the ability to look from this world into the other.

6.2: Head-Shaped Musenge Cup, Kanyok (Democratic Republic of the Congo), early 20th century, wood, metal, acquired in 1925 from Hermann Haberer, III C 33233

Among the Kanyok, head-shaped as well as non-figurative cups were used primarily in religious ceremonies to honor paternal ancestors of chiefs. Through the communal drinking of palm wine, the unification of the



living with the dead was accomplished so that the power of one generation was carried over into the next.

6.3: Mary with the Dead Christ (Pietà), Spain, 1680–1700, painted terracotta, acquired in 1984, gift of Franz Rademacher, 8/84

The Gospels do not mention that Mary held the dead Christ in her lap after the Descent from the Cross. The image of the Pietà (compassion) derives from developments in medieval piety, in which the faithful were called on to imagine themselves taking part in events from the Bible and to re-experience the emotions of the protagonists. This rendering probably served as an image for private devotion.

6.4: Death of the Virgin, Michael Pacher (workshop), Tirol (Austria), ca. 1500, linden wood with original polychromy, acquired in 1935 from the Figdor Collection, 8616

At the moment of her death Mary is surrounded by the twelve disciples. In a priest-like gesture, Peter dips a brush in a basin of holy water that he will sprinkle on Mary. The ritualistic dimension of the scene is underlined by the processional cross and funeral candle in the background. Until well into the nineteenth century, deaths that did not occur suddenly had a public and ceremonial character; surrounded by members of society, the dying person commended his or her soul to God and received absolution.

6.5–6.6: Death and Coronation of the Virgin, Carinthia (Austria), ca. 1510, limewood with original polychromy, acquired in 2005 from Bernhard Decker, Frankfurt am Main, 1/2005 and acquired in 1893 as an anonymous gift, 2096

On the left-hand panel, Mary kneels at a prie-dieu (prayer desk) in the hour of her death, accompanied by the disciples. A large canopied bed on which Mary is about to be laid stands behind the figures. On the right-hand panel, Mary kneels again and receives a crown from the Trinity (God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost each depicted in the form of Christ with a crown of thorns).

AT DEATH'S DOOR

In many cultures gravestones, death masks, portraits, and photographs keep the memory of an individual alive. Since antiquity, graves have been called the resting places of the dead. In both continents, likenesses of varying levels of idealization help present and future generations in remembering the departed and their deeds.

6.7: Gravestone of the Goldsmith Andromachos, Luxor (Egypt), 6th/7th century, sandstone, acquired in 1900/01 in Luxor, 4486

An inscription in Greek letters identifies the deceased as “Andromachos, the goldsmith.” The central motif, a cross in a wreath of leaves, announces that he was a Christian. In Christianity, Jesus’s death on the cross delivers mankind from sin and gives it hope of eternal life. The name Andromachos on the stone allowed relatives to find the grave and pray for the deceased’s salvation.

6.8: Mukudj Mask, Punu or Mpongwe (Gabon), wood, painted, acquired in 1896 from Johann Friedrich Gustav Umlauff, III C 6306

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In the Punu region of southern Gabon, particularly deserving ancestors were honored with festivities in which dancers appeared on stilts—sometimes as high as three meters—wearing white masks called *mukudj* or *okuji*. *Mukudj* masks are considered portraits of extremely beautiful women. The surface is rubbed with white kaolin, a color associated with the souls of ancestors.

6.9: Portrait Mask of a Young Woman, Francesco Laurana (Italy), ca. 1470–80, marble, acquired in Florence in 1877, 259

This mask was probably embedded in a funerary effigy made of another material. The generic facial features make it difficult to recognize a true-to-life likeness; this is probably the ideal representation of a woman. In contrast to the Punu mask, which was used in a dance to honor the dead, this marble mask was part of a static memorial ensemble.

6.10: Commemorative Head of a King, Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), 17th–18th century, copper alloy, acquired in 1898 from Eduard Schmidt, III C 8177

A ceremonial title for the *oba*, the king of Benin, is “Great Head”—the head is the most important part of the body, the seat of reason. Such heads originally stood on memorial altars for deceased *oba* in the royal palace. Benin heads were not meant as lifelike portraits but as idealized representations of royalty that convey dynastic continuity over generations.

6.11: Head of an Emperor, Eastern Roman Empire (Turkey?), 4th century (?), acquired in 1913 as a gift, 6730

The youthful head wears a diadem of oak leaves with a piece of jewelry in the middle. This attribute identifies the sitter as an emperor. As in the case of the Benin head, this is not a realistic depiction of an individual but rather the embodiment of an office through attributes of power.

TRANSIENCE

Numerous European works of art warn Christians not to squander their time on earth but to fear God and to live as free of sin as possible, since, according to the Bible, “when that day and that hour will be, no one knows” (Matthew 24:36). The transience of earthly life is the main idea behind the genre of the *Vanitas* (Latin for “vanity” as well as “nothingness”), among whose best-known examples are the Dutch still lifes of the seventeenth century, with symbols of ephemerality such as skulls, hour-glasses, flowers, or candles.

6.12: Vanitas, Spain?, 16th–17th century, jet, acquired in 1889, 803

This sculpture represents a decaying skull on which dragons and snails creep. The details only reveal themselves when one turns the object around in the light. The smooth surface of the material, jet, is pleasing to the touch. It is likely that the successive owners of the sculpture frequently took it in their hands, thereby being reminded to lead a deserving life.

CEREMONIAL

The act of mourning is not always a personal or communal manifestation of grief. It can also be a part of rituals of remembrance and commemora-

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tion. Or it can be an institutional act, a gesture that eases the transition between one king or chief and the next, for instance, but which also stresses the continuity of the monarchy or chieftdom itself.

6.13–6.15: Three *Pleurants*, Jaume Cascalls, Spain, ca. 1370, alabaster with traces of polychromy, acquired in 1910, gift of James Simon, 8017, acquired in 1935 from the Figdor Collection, 8548 and 8549

Funerals for medieval rulers were elaborate events. Since the thirteenth century, *pleurants*—members of the funeral cortège who mourned the loss of the deceased and prayed for his or her salvation—were represented along the walls of tombs. One *pleurant* breaks his staff—a sign that the power he received from the king has now been broken by the monarch's death.

6.16: Mask of the Ndunga Society with its Bikunda Bell, Loango, Vili (Republic of the Congo), wood, feathers, fabric, raffia, acquired in 1898, gift of Robert Visser, III C 8098 a–b

According to Robert Visser, who presented this mask to the museum in 1898, bandunga masks were used at coronations of kings and at funerals for members of the royal family, to which the mask wearer also belonged. The fact that the mask was hidden from sight between uses made its appearance—accompanied by a wooden bell (*bikunda*)—all the more impressive.

6.17: Reliquary Ensemble: Receptacle with Figures (Byeri), Fang-Ngumba (Cameroon), 19th century, wood, feathers, iron, brass, glass, tree bark, acquired in 1897 from Georg Zenker, III C 6689 a–c

In the belief system of the various Fang families, the skull was the location of a person's vital energy. Skulls of ancestors were accordingly revered like relics, especially those of forbears who had distinguished themselves through their exemplary life, courage, reason, and virtue. The skulls were kept in such tree-bark baskets. Carved heads or figures on the vessel acted as guards and protectors of the bones, and as evocations of the ancestors.

7. COMPARISON

IVORY

7.1a Saltcellar, Sapi (Sierra Leone), ca. 1490–1530, ivory, before 1688 in the Kunstammer, III C 17036 a, b

This ivory saltcellar is closely linked to early Portuguese journeys to West Africa. It resembles a fantastical armillary sphere, a navigation instrument. Portuguese patrons brought drawings, prints, and objects that they wanted African carvers to emulate in ivory. Using these models, local artists carved intricate objects that combined motifs from Europe and Africa.

7.1b Hercules, circle of Raimund Faltz, Berlin? (Germany), before 1694, ivory, before 1694 in the Kunstammer, 725

The salt cellar was already in the Berlin Kunstammer when the Hercules was executed. Ivory carving had been practiced in Western Europe inter-

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mittently since late antiquity. From the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century, the raw material came almost exclusively from East Africa. In West Africa, the Portuguese found a new source for tusks, which, together with the extraordinary carvings, such as the saltcellar, helped revive European interest in ivory sculpture.

BECOMING ART

7.2a Statue of the Goddess Irhevbu or of Princess Edeleyo, Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), 16th or 17th century, copper alloy, acquired in 1900 from William Downing Webster, III C 10864

7.2b Putto with Tambourine, Donatello, Tuscany (Italy). 1428-29, bronze, traces of gilding, acquired in 1902 from Durlacher Brothers, 2653

The figures of a putto and of a young woman from the Benin kingdom are today among the highlights of Berlin's museums. The putto, a representation of a young boy with wings, twists around his axis to his left and draws his hand back to strike his tambourine; the artist has cast the most fleeting of moments in metal. The putto was part of a group along with five similar sculptures that crowned the baptismal font of Siena Cathedral. The female figure probably was originally part of a memorial altar or a shrine. The master artist who made it has emphasized her youthful beauty and the finest details of her hair, face and jewelry.

After 1900, despite their unquestionable importance in their original contexts, the two objects were interpreted differently in Berlin's museum collections. Celebrated as a key work by the Renaissance master Donatello, the putto had a prominent place in the new Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum (now Bode Museum). The Benin figure, by contrast, was more difficult to assimilate. Although in 1897 many masterpieces from Benin were looted by British troops who attacked the kingdom, their artistic value was disputed. Such works often were seen as "primitive." Some commentators saw them as artistic and to name their creators "native artists"; others found that the works left a "barbaric impression."

WILD ANIMALS

7.3a Leopard Aquamanile, Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), 17th century, brass, acquired in 1900 from Hans Meyer, III C 10877

European Aquamaniles probably made their way to western Africa via Portuguese trading ships. In the kingdom of Benin, they counted among the status symbols of the king (*oba*). While in the medieval imagination, the lion was the king of animals and the emblem of European rulers, in the kingdom of Benin this role was assigned to the leopard, which was considered the most dangerous of all animals.

7.3b Lion Aquamanile, Lower Saxony (Germany) ca. 1500, bronze, acquired in 1951 from Adolf Weinmüller, Munich, 2/51

Vessels in the shape of animals for washing hands were already called aquamaniles in the Middle Ages, a term composed of the Latin words for water (*aqua*) and hand (*manus*). Such objects were first produced around 800 in the Middle East and made their way into Central Europe from Is-

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Islamic Spain. Up to the sixteenth century, European aquamaniles were produced mainly in Germany, specifically in Lower Saxony and Nuremberg.

MUST A PORTRAIT BE LIFELIKE?

7.4a Commemorative Portrait of King Fosia, Ateu Atsa, Bangwa (Cameroon), 19th century, wood, acquired in 1899 from Gustav Conrau, III C 10514

Each work represents a royal figure whose identity is known to us and whose depiction is not lifelike. Recognizable by his drinking horn, tobacco pipe, necklace, and cap, this wooden sculpture portrays the Bangwa king Fosia. Preserved in royal treasure houses, such figures served as reminders of early rulers as well as a means of communicating with them.

7.4b Queen Jeanne de Navarre as a Donor, Paris (France), ca. 1305, limestone, acquired in 2006 from Pierre Girot de Langlade, Paris, property of the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein, M 296

Although this figure looks quite naturalistic to Western eyes, it is not a lifelike portrayal. The queen's face follows an idealized type common for images of the Virgin in Paris around 1300, as does her posture, with the building taking the place of the Christ Child. Jeanne de Navarre would have been identified through the heraldry and inscriptions in the architecture in which the figure originally stood.

WHO NEEDS PROTECTION?

7.5a Mangaaka (Power Figure, *nkisi nkondi*), Yombe, Chiloango river region (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, or Cabinda, Angola), 19th century, wood, iron, porcelain, pigments, acquired in 1904 from Robert Visser, III C 17114

Confronting the viewer with its power, this *mangaaka* figure helped maintain justice and order in the Yombe region north of the lower Congo river. At the same time, it was meant to fend off evils and inspire confidence in the social order at a time of traumatic upheavals caused by the "scramble for Africa" by European powers.

7.5b Virgin of Mercy, Michel Erhart, Ulm (Germany), ca. 1480, limewood with part of its original polychromy, acquired in 1850 for the Kunstammer, 421

In the Middle Ages the faithful hoped that the Virgin would ward off evils. This group originally stood in a church, probably on an altar. People kneeled before it, like the small figures under the cloak, and prayed to Mary, the mother of Jesus, for her protection. The image thus served as a focus for prayers that were meant to give the believers hope and courage.

FRAGMENTED OBJECTS

7.6a *Bwiti* Figure, Kota or Kélé (Gabon), 19th century, wood, copper, wire, acquired in 1877 from Oskar Lenz, III C 1088

This figure originally was part of an ancestral shrine, crowning a basket that contained bones from the local community's lineage. It expresses the

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invisible and abstract power of ancestors in visual terms. Its lustrous surface, made of hammered and bent copper wire, suggests otherworldliness. The sculptural composition—a broad face with eyes and a nose, mounted on a trunk-like base—is both pared down and highly suggestive, evoking a simultaneously fragmented and intact body.

7.6b Reliquary Bust of a Bishop, Brussels (?) (Belgium), ca. 1520, oak and polychromy, acquired in 1961 from Julius Böhler, Munich, 2/61

This sculpture of a bishop still contains two saintly relics: a skull fragment in the head, and a piece of rib in the chest under a rock crystal. Like the relics he holds, the bishop is also fragmented. Caught eternally in the act of benediction, he has been cut off at his chest and placed atop a socle.

MYTHICAL HEROES

7.7a King and Culture Hero Chibinda Ilunga, Chokwe (Angola), 19th century, wood, fabric, hair, glass, plant fibers, acquired in 1880 from Otto H. Schütt, III C 1255

The Chokwe derive their origins from a mythical hero Chibinda Ilunga. The realistic-expressive composition underscores the qualities of a leader: the slightly bent knees, the arms held forward, and the oversized hands and feet convey strength and a readiness to act. Exceptional abilities underlie the serene dignity of the royal hero.

7.7b Christ in Distress, Hans Leinberger, Landshut (Germany), ca. 1525, limewood with polychromy, acquired in 1925 in Ergoldsbach near Landshut, 8347

While African heroes are almost always portrayed as “heroic,” as if their superhuman deeds would leave them unchallenged, the agonizing suffering of Jesus that leads to his death and resurrection is a central tenet for Christians. The musculature of Leinberger’s Christ, which had never before been portrayed in such a Herculean form, palpably demonstrates the doctrine of Incarnation: God becoming human in Christ.

REPRESENTATION AND EMBODIEMENT

7.8a *Akuaba*, Asante (Ghana), 19th century, wood, acquired in 1885 from J. Sanger, III C 2491

The *akuaba* figure mimics the appearance of a newborn, with rolls of flesh layering at its neck and folds of skin that frame its eyes in an expression of intense smiling or squinting. It also embodies the stature of a child. Such sculptures, often considered dolls, were given to young Asante women hoping to conceive a child. The owner of this *akuaba* would have cared for it, dressed it, and carried it on her back, swaddled in cloth.

7.8b Christ Child (*Santo Bambino*), Perugia (Italy), ca. 1320, walnut with original polychromy, acquired in 1968 from Ulrich Middeldorf, Florence, 11/68

This Christ Child is among the first of its kind, a type of cult object known as the *Santo Bambino*. Christ is shown as an infant. He still wears his swaddling clothes, and his skin consists of a thick layer of gesso and pink

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pigments with lifelike creases, highlighting the miracle of Mary's miraculous pregnancy despite her virginity. He was a devotional image but was also treated as a living child. The nuns would presumably have laid him in a manger during the Christmas liturgy.

THE GAZE

7.9a Reliquary Figure (*byeri*), Fang-Ntumu or -Ngumba (Cameroon), 19th or 20th century, wood, brass, acquired in 1949 from August Windenmann, III C 36842

The *byeri* figure was originally mounted on the lip of a bark basket that contained bones of ancestors. The eyes made of brass tacks lock the beholder into place. Such imposing frontality had a protective function, orienting the viewer and communicating defense of the relics in the basket, which were accessible only to initiated men.

7.9b Enthroned Virgin and Child (*Sedes Sapientiae*), Presbyter Martinus, Tuscany (Italy), 1199, poplar with original polychromy, 190 x 54 x 68 cm, acquired in 1887 in Florence, 29

This work is an exceptionally well-preserved example of monumental Romanesque sculpture. It demands attention and viewing from the front. From this angle we see Christ seated exactly in front of Mary's womb, a reference to Mary's miraculous pregnancy despite her virginity. The sculpture was not only to be looked at, but also looked back. Common with medieval cult images, this game of "seeing and being seen" allowed contact with the divine through mere human sensory experiences.

MEMORY

7.10a Male Ancestor Figure, Hemba (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, hide, raffia cloth, acquired in 1897 from Hans von Ramsay, III E 5200 a–c

Among the Hemba, ancestor figures strove not for the most true-to-life depiction of individuals but rather for an idealized representation of forebears as honored and righteous members of society. At the same time the figures embodied underlying social principles and values. The ownership of one or several of these statues by chiefs and office holders signaled the prime importance of their lineage.

7.10b Bust of Willibald Imhoff the Elder, Johann Gregor van der Schardt, Nuremberg (Germany), 1570, terracotta, polychromy, acquired in 1858 from the Minutoli Collection, 538

In 1570 Willibald Imhoff (1519–1580), a successful Nuremberg merchant, commissioned the Netherlandish sculptor Johann Gregor van der Schardt (ca. 1530-1591) to make a life-size bust of him. The bust of his wife was produced ten years later. These true-to-life portrayals stood in the Imhoff family house in Nuremberg, where relatives, descendants, and guests could view the portraits and remember the couple.

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SUPERIORITY AND POISE

7.11a Memorial Figure with Twins, Bangwa (Cameroon), 19th century, wood, acquired in 1899 from Gustav Conrau, III C 10521

In the Cameroon Grasslands, twins were considered to be the embodiment of particularly dangerous powers that were neither good nor evil. Here they emphasize the high status of the middle figure, since he sits while the twins stand. The sculpture is not a portrait in the sense of a true-to-life rendition. It conveys values and character traits that are considered necessary qualities in a chief.

7.11b Saint George Fighting the Dragon, Tilman Riemenschneider, Würzburg (Germany), ca. 1490, limewood, acquired in 1887 in Würzburg, 414

In an allegory of the battle between good and evil, George, on horseback and in full armor like a medieval knight, raises the sword with which he will slay the dragon that is lying on the ground. The scene is portrayed with notably little drama. The resolute expression of the saint, the placement of a horse's hoof on the dragon's head, and the anything-but-threatening appearance of the beast leave little doubt as to the outcome of the battle.

MOTHERHOOD?

7.12a Pfemba Mother and Child Figure, Loango (Republic of the Congo), 19th century, wood, 1896 gift of Wilhelm Joest, III C 6286

Mother-and-child relationships are understood and experienced differently in various cultures and times. The term *pfemba* denotes mother-and-child statuettes from the regions of Yombe, Cabinda, and Loango. These images underscore the maintenance and renewal of society through the fertility of women. Such mother-and-child images were integrated into the regalia of male rulers and emphasized the centrality of women as the fundament of male power.

7.12b Seated Virgin and Child, Michel Erhart, Ulm (Germany), ca. 1480/85, limewood, 39 x 43.5 x 21.5 cm, acquired in 1882 in Munich, 408

Michel Erhart's sculpture emphasizes the intimate relationship of Mary and the Christ Child. Mary's devotion is expressed in the tilt of her head toward the child, and her melancholy expression seems to reflect her premonition of her son's suffering and death. The rough masonry banquette on which the Virgin is seated refers to Golgotha, the "place of the skull" and the location where Christ was crucified.

MEMORIALS TO AFRICAN RULERS

7.13a Altar group (aseberia) of King (oba) Akenzua, Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), ca. 1735, copper alloy, acquired in 1898 from Consul Eduard Schmidt, III C 8164

Benin, like Brandenburg-Prussia, participated in the Atlantic slave trade. Slaves and prisoners of war are important visual elements in memorials to Benin's kings. Here they lie decapitated along with other symbols of royal rule, such as leopards and hands grasping leaves. The German consul,

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Eduard Schmidt, acquired this sculpture after British troops conquered Benin and looted many of its artworks.

7.13b scaled-down copy of the equestrian portrait of the Great Elector Frederick William, Andreas Schlüter, Johann Jacobi, Berlin (Germany), 1712, bronze, alabaster, transferred in 1875 from the Kunstammer, 534.

The Great Elector Frederick William (1640-1688) founded a colony, Gross Friedrichsburg, on the West African coast in today's Ghana. This enabled him to participate in the trade in slaves, ivory, and gold. The four chained figures on the base may represent the defeated European enemies of the Elector. They can also be understood as references to slavery. For Prussian rulers, the African colony was a source of wealth, power, and prestige.

HAIR

7.14a Woman of rank (queen mother or ruler's wife), Chokwe (Angola), 19th century, wood, human hair, traces of red clay, acquired in 1886 from the estate of Gustav Nachtigal, III C 2969

Hair, as a medium of self-expression, of status, and of power has often been a theme of artistic engagement. The real human hair that crowns the head of the figure heightens her immediacy and expressive power. If the work was conceived as a memorial figure or portrait of a particular woman of high status, the hair may actually have been hers. If so, it would serve as a bridge between the sculpture and the person it portrays.

7.14b Virgin and Child known as the Dangolsheim Madonna, Nikolaus Gerhaert von Leyden, Strasbourg (France), ca. 1460-1465, walnut with polychromy, acquired in 1913, 7055

This Madonna may have more in common with the Chokwe figure than at first appears. Strasbourg Cathedral was famous for its relics of the veil and hair of the Virgin, which had reportedly been donated by Charlemagne himself. This sculpture may have originally stood in the Virgin's Chapel in the cathedral, where it served as a receptacle for the relics. During conservation treatment in the 1980s, a chamber containing relics was found in the figure's right shoulder.

POWER AND COMMUNITY

7.15a Chair, Chokwe (Angola), 19th or early 20th century, wood, hide, brass, acquired in 1938 from Hermann Baumann, III C 37491

This type of Chokwe chair, among the most important prestige objects of Chokwe chiefs at the turn of the century, visualizes society and its order. Below the seat are densely packed scenes from everyday life: preparing food, hunting animals, childbirth, and child rearing. Above are rows of participants in a male initiation ceremony. The chair, used only ritually, served as an analogue for the chiefly power that brought such hierarchies into order.

7.15b Holy Kinship, Silesia (Poland), early 16th century, beechwood with original polychromy, donated in 1918 by James Simon, 8191

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The relief of the Holy Kinship also visualizes a hierarchy of sorts: the extended family of Mary and Jesus, which became the focus of increased veneration in the late Middle Ages. In the middle are Mary with the Christ Child, her mother Anne, and her two half-sisters; above are their husbands and fathers. Thematized here is the power of matrilineal genealogy. It is the children that the women bore who are scattered throughout the sculpture and challenge its visual order.

PORTRAIT HEADS

7.16a Head of an *Oba*, Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), 16th century, bronze, acquired in 1898 from Consul Eduard Schmidt, III C 8169

This head originally stood on an altar in the royal palace in Benin City to commemorate a deceased king (*oba*). Although such heads were associated with specific rulers, none of them strives to be a mimetic likeness but instead conveys the sense that enlightened leadership endures across generations. The head straddles “dead” and “memorialized,” “specific” and idealized,” “person” and “ancestor,” thus asking us to reconsider what portraits are and what they represent.

7.16b Head of John the Baptist on a Charger (Belgium), ca. 1430, oak, acquired in 1973, property of the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein, M 268

Depicted in this work is the head of John the Baptist on a charger, as if it had just been cut off on Herod’s orders. Unlike the Benin funerary portrait, which depicts a king’s power derived through ancestors and existing across time, this sculpture reifies the intensity of the specific moment of death, going so far as to “present death itself.”

POWERFUL WOMEN

7.17a Memorial Head of a Queen Mother (*iyoba*), Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), copper alloy, acquired in 1901 from J.C. Stevens, Auctioneer, III C 12507

Before 1897 this bust of a woman probably adorned a memorial altar in Benin’s royal palace. Her beauty is not the temporary allure of youth, nor the radiance that comes with age and wisdom. Instead, she is shown as ageless. The bust has often been associated with Idia, the mother of Oba Esigie. In 1515 she saved the kingdom from invaders. Her son rewarded her by giving her the title *iyoba*. Thereafter, this position became one of the kingdom’s most powerful political offices.

7.17b Portrait Bust of a young woman, possibly representing Marietta Strozzi, Desiderio da Settignano, Florence (Italy), ca. 1462, marble, acquired in 1842 in Florence, 77

The sculptor of this marble bust has evoked a moment in the life of a beautiful, wealthy young woman. Beauty can be seen as a medium through which the bust communicates the woman’s currency as a fiancée, wife, and dynastic match. Although there are examples of women who wielded power in Renaissance Italy, female political authority was not institutionalized there as it was in the Kingdom of Benin.

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ORDER AND JUSTICE

7.18a Ngil Mask, Fang (Gabon or Cameroon), 19th century, wood, kaolin, acquired in 1895 from H. Oelert, III C

Up until the beginning of the twentieth century, such masks made appearances among the Fang of Gabon and Cameroon in *ngil* rituals. This society carried out a kind of inquisition, in which evildoers were identified and also punished. The masks therefore warned against defying social order while simultaneously symbolizing the jurisdiction that the *ngil* society possessed. The similarities to a skull made clear that certain offenses could be punishable by death.

7.18b West Tribune from the Monastery Church of Gröningen, Saxony (Germany), ca. 1150–60, stucco, acquired in 1902, 2739

In the middle of the frieze, Christ is enthroned on a rainbow, his arms spread wide open; at his sides sit ten (originally twelve) apostles. In Christian belief, at the End of Times all souls will appear before Christ to be judged. In the church at Gröningen, under the frieze, the Resurrection of the Dead and their assignment to either Heaven or Hell—depending on the way they lived their lives—was depicted.

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COINCIDENCE OR CONNECTION?

7.19a King (*oba*) with Mudfish-Legs and two Assistants, relief plaque or pendant, Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), 18th century, copper alloy, acquired in 1905 from H. Schaumburg, III C 19276

The works in this comparison are similarly shaped and share a striking subject matter: each focuses on a being who is part human and part fish, a hybrid creature of land and sea. The Benin plaque could be an image of divine kingship showing an *oba* as Olokun, the god of the sea, or a depiction of Oba Ohen (14th century), who was paralyzed from the waist down and was said to have fish for legs.

7.19b Doorknocker with a Nereid, Venice (Italy), late 16th Century, patinated bronze, acquired in 1902 from Adolph von Beckenrath, property of the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein, M 39/125

The traditions from which the doorknocker and relief come may not have been entirely separate. In sixteenth-century Venice, Nereids (the daughters of Nereus, the Greek god of the sea) were commonly depicted as mermaids. Seafaring Europeans brought their own stories about the sea as they explored the African coast. Their myths almost certainly mixed with African ones. In the kingdom of Benin, the strangers from over the waters became part of the local mythology surrounding the god Olokun.

VIRTUOSITY AND AUTHENTICITY

7.20a *Tyi Wara* or *Sogoni Kun* Headdress, Bamana, Bougouni (Mali), 19th or early 20th century, wood, cowrie shells, beads, acquired in 1910 from the Museum für Völkerkunde, Hamburg, III C 25876

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In the creation myth of the Bamana, the primordial being *tyi wara*, a wild animal, teaches agriculture to mankind. Headdresses in animal form were used during ritual dances for the cultivation of fields. This masterpiece of abstraction combines in one creature the horns of an antelope with the physical characteristics of two other animals. The lower part, with bent legs, is reminiscent of an aardvark, while the arching, serrated middle part recalls a pangolin.

7.20b Diana and the Stag, Paulus Ättinger, Regensburg (Germany) ca. 1610, silver, repoussé, punched, chiseled and partially gilded, inlaid with brilliants, rubies, emeralds, and pearls, 34.5 x 30 x 15 cm, Würth Collection, Künzelsau, 3864, on loan to the Bode Museum

Strictly speaking, this is a drinking vessel, since the heads of the stag and of the large dogs are removable, and their bodies can be filled with wine. Such vessels were used in in the early seventeenth century as showpieces for the entertainment of guests. In the nineteenth century, precious stones were added to make the group look like a *Kunstkammer* object and thus more marketable.

OPPOSITE OR COMPLEMENTARY?

7.21a Two Figures with Cup, Warua Master, Luba (Democratic Republic of the Congo), wood, acquired in 1904 from Leo Frobenius, III C 19996

The Luba kingdom in southeastern Congo was characterized by sexual duality. Throughout history women were considered messengers and advisors of kings, which explains their presence on emblems of male rulers, as on this object. Female and male are shown here in balance, as two components of an ideal and positive whole, as signs of divinely sanctioned leadership.

7.21b Memento Mori, ascribed to Chicart Bailly (active in Paris ca. 1490 to 1533), Paris (France), ca. 1520, ivory, acquired in 1935 from the Figdor Collection, 8554

The group is a refined example of a Christian Memento Mori ("remember that you must die"): a portrayal of the inescapability of death and at the same time a reminder to lead a meaningful and sin-free Christian life. Clearly the young woman shown here does not do that: with the middle finger of her right hand she points at her genitals. The antithetical portrayal of the naked woman and Death is a clear warning that a careless, unchaste life would be punished by eternity in Hell.

THE SAME, BUT DIFFERENT

7.22a Saint Anthony, Kingdom of Kongo (Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, or Angola), 17th–19th century (?), wood, acquired in 1986 from Charles J. Massar, III C 44072

This image of Saint Anthony of Padua with the Christ Child on a book was carved in the kingdom of Kongo, which had adopted Christianity toward the end of the fifteenth century, shortly after their encounter with the Portuguese. A specifically Kongolese Catholicism was developed. Anthony is depicted as a young monk in accordance with European tradition. The

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child, however, holds a fly whisk, a Kongolese emblem of power. Such images could also be used as power figures. In this case, the otherworldly force is present in them, and these figures were not simple representations, like that of Saint Christopher.

7.22b Saint Christopher, Munich (Germany), ca. 1490, limewood with original polychromy, acquired in 1893 from Mr. Güterbork, Munich, 2033

These two images of saints carrying the Christ Child derive from two different versions of Catholicism—one European, the other Kongolese—and presumably also two understandings of the world. In this German sculpture, a giant carries a child across a river. The child reveals himself to be Jesus, who, according to Christian belief, carries the sins of the world. Christ baptized the giant and named him Christopher (he who carries Christ). The dynamic composition heightens the supernatural character of the scene.

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