



HISTORY OF THE COLLECTION

The 40 Years of Collecting: A Celebration of the Standard Bank African Art Collection exhibition is a celebration of the partnership between the Standard Bank and the University of Witwatersrand (also Wits University) in building one of the largest classical African art collections in the southern hemisphere known as the Standard Bank African Art Collection. Then known as the Standard Bank Foundation of African Art, the collection was initially housed at the University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries and currently at Wits Art Museum (WAM) which was established in 2012. The agreement was formalised in 1979 when the senior executives of both institutions (Mr Ian McKenzie and Professor Karl Tober respectively) signed an agreement based on the common goal of collecting, preserving and conserving African cultural material.

Over the years the debates around African Art or Art from the African continent have taken different shapes and raised various concerns. These debates have primarily been centred around the politics of museum display, how certain objects are represented within the museum/gallery space and questions around ownership. There has also been debates around the classification and categorisation of African objects and how this has often limited our understanding of the multiplicity of culture in Africa.

The first few years of collecting focused on mainly sculptural works with a focus on masks, beadwork, and other kinds of artefacts considered as *utilitarian*. Sculpture is an important part of the expressive modes used in African traditional art making. In this exhibition there is an emphasis placed on works on sculptural works as it makes up a substantial part of the collection. This is important to note because figurative sculpture from the African continent is almost always linked to rituals, ceremonies as well as the spiritual and cosmological systems of the people who create the work.

The knowledge behind the context and meaning of the pieces is thus critical as it is linked to the belief systems and customs of the different cultural groups that make up a multiplicity of cultures that make up the African continent.



Zulu
KwaZulu-Natal
Induku (Staff), Undated
Patinated wood
106,5 cm
Standard Bank African Art Collection
(Wits Art Museum)

A LEARNER RESOURCE ON THE ART OF THE 40 YEARS OF COLLECTING: A CELEBRATION OF THE STANDARD BANK AFRICAN ART COLLECTION

Curated by Dr Same Mdluli
Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg

13 May – 6 July 2019

#AfricanheART



Igbo society differs from one town to another in terms of its range of festivals and types of masks. Often the spiritual and stylistic forms of the masks are intermingled between regions, making it difficult to trace a mask to one location.

However, masking traditions throughout the various Igbo regions share underlying themes and similar spirits. There are two important mask types among the Igbo; those idealizing the qualities of young women, and those representing the powers of men. The maiden

mask embodies the former but when the mask is worn it is always by a man. The maiden spirit dancer thus represents the ideals of youthful feminine grace and beauty, albeit exaggerated both in the masks and the performance.

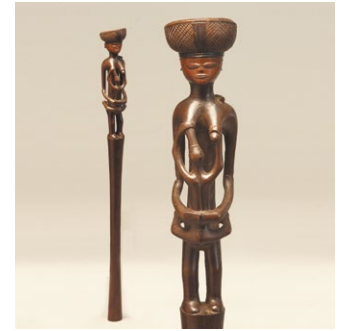
The Tjokwe (Chokwe) live largely northern Angola and south western DRC and form part of the larger grouping known as the Luba-Lunda complex. The group also has links with the Lunda and Lwena, sharing a common linguistic and cultural basis. Like many other African societies Tjokwe (Chokwe) art usually takes the form of a collective function or expressing a more individual expression of personal items from intimate ceremonies such as initiation. The use of figurative staffs as items of regalia of social hierarchy is a common feature in not only the Tjokwe (Chokwe) society but also in many other parts of the continent.



Igbo
Nigeria
Mmwo (maiden spirit) mask, Undated
Wood, pigment, wool, nails
47 cm x 15 cm x 30 cm
Standard Bank African Art Collection
(Wits Art Museum)
Photo: Wayne Oosthuizen



Tjokwe (Chokwe)
(Angola and DRC)
Staff, Undated
Patinated wood, brass studs
49 cm
Standard Bank African Art Collection
(Wits Art Museum)



Tjokwe (Chokwe)
(Angola and DRC)
Staff, Undated
Patinated wood
74,5 cm
Standard Bank African Art Collection
(Wits Art Museum)

GLOSSARY:

Utilitarian:

designed to be useful or for practical use rather than attractive.

Artefact:

- an object made by a human being, typically one of cultural or historical interest.
- something observed in a scientific investigation or experiment that is not naturally present but occurs because of the preparative or investigative procedure.

Material culture:

refers to the physical objects, resources, and spaces that people use to define their culture.

Heritage:

- something that is handed down from the past, as a tradition: a national heritage of honour, pride, and courage.
- something that comes or belongs to one by reason of birth; an inherited lot or portion: a heritage of poverty and suffering.

Dynasty:

- a line of hereditary rulers of a country.
- a succession of people from the same family who play a prominent role in business, politics, or another field.

Craftsmanship:

a skill in a particular craft; the quality of design and work shown in something made by hand; artistry.

The Ibo live in south-eastern Nigeria between the Niger and the Imo Rivers. There are two distinct groups, the southern and northern Ibo, and the art forms of the two groups differ to some extent in both style and subject matter. Among the Ibo of Nigeria there is a vast range of sculpture styles that it becomes impossible to speak of one "Ibo style". The southern Ibo have many types of masquerade, the Okorosia masked dances being the southern version of Mmwo masquerade found among the northern Ibo.



Northern Ibo
Nigeria
Mmwo (Maiden Spirit), Undated
Wood, Pigment
41, 5 cm
Standard Bank African Art Collection
(Wits Art Museum)

The Songye live in south-eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Songye society is very much rooted on traditional customs and ceremonies such as rites of passage. The wood used in the mask is also important and is often linked to the spiritual significance of the tree from which the wood emanated. Very little is known about the function of the kifwebe masks, although they have been sighted in male initiation ceremonies.



Songye
Democratic Republic of Congo
Kifwebe (Mask), Undated
Wood, pigment
33 cm
Standard Bank African Art Collection
(Wits Art Museum)

40 YEARS OF COLLECTING: A CELEBRATION OF THE STANDARD BANK AFRICAN ART COLLECTION

IS THEREFORE NOT ONLY ANY EXHIBITION
THAT CELEBRATES THE PAST
FOUR DECADES OF THE PRESERVATION
AND CONSERVATION OF A RICH
CULTURAL HERITAGE BUT ALSO
CULMINATION OF A COLLECTION OF OBJECTS
THAT HAVE SHAPED OUR UNDERSTANDING
OF THE MULTIPLICITY OF
AFRICAN CULTURES
AND THE CREATIVE IMPULSE
THAT CONNECTS ITS PEOPLES.

Nesta Nala was born at Oyaya, Zululand and lived in Eshowe in KwaZulu-Natal. She was taught to make beer pots by her mother, Siphiwe, who was also a leading local potter. The Nala Dynasty is important to note in this exhibition because of the generational line of a pottery technique that has been passed on from one generation to the next.

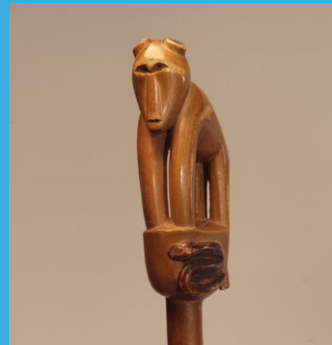


Nesta Nala
Ukhamba, 1997
Ceramic pot
Standard Bank Corporate
Art Collection

Zulu pots are used for the consumption of home brewed beer or amasi (milk curds) and are used at various ceremonies and traditional rituals. Pot making is traditionally made by the women in the community and is an art form that is passed on generationally. Pot making is also a sophisticated skill that does not only reveal the elegant simplicity and unique handmade patterning, but also a form of defining legacy through lineage. The decoration on the pot is traditionally based on the family clan and region. Zulu pots perform three main functions. The bigger imbica pot is used for brewing beer, the *ukhamba* pot for serving it and the *umancishana* pot size is used for cooking meat, storing grain or water and drinking sour milk.

In the late 19th century the Zulu were and remain one of the dominant groups in southern Africa today. This is also largely due to the influential role King Shaka's empire played in the early 19th century.

Most Zulu staffs serve as dual function walking sticks and clubs. They are used in daily life by many people today. Dance staffs are used during specific ceremonies. The elaborate symbolism of the staff head is usually sign of status and importance in the community.



Zulu
KwaZulu-Natal
Induku (Staff), Undated
Patinated wood
106.5 cm
Standard Bank African Art Collection
(Wits Art Museum)

In the first 10 years of collecting the collection grew substantially particularly focusing in material from southern Africa. During this time the management of the collection undertook an extensive exercise in not only accessioning and archiving the various objects in the collection but also categorizing and classifying it within certain geographical groupings.

However, while this was based on a pragmatic decision to avoid confusion and a conflation of meanings it also highlighted several concerns around the classification and categorization of African art objects determined primarily along western criteria. It was thus important to make the collection accessible for a wider audience through various exhibitions to allow various engagements with its content and context. Exhibitions are therefore an important part of creating platforms for conversations and dialogues around the various ways of dealing with the complexities of displaying cultural material within a museum and/or gallery space.



Traditionally the Yoruba build their houses and shrines around an open space at the centre of which is usually a pond (impluvium) for rain water. The pond is surrounded by a colonnade with an inward sloping roof supported by posts. The houses of chiefs and some shrines to the deities have elaborately sculpted posts like this one.

Yoruba
Nigeria
Opo (housepost), Undated
135 cm x 13.5 cm x 15 cm
Standard Bank African Art Collection
(Wits Art Museum)



Yoruba kings wear beaded crowns to protect their “inner mind”, the seat of the ancestral soul and the spiritual core of the individual. Crowns worn in public are different from those worn inside the palace. The palace crowns are smaller than those worn in public and were originally cone shapes made of indigenous coral and later, imported glass beads.



Yoruba
Nigeria
Orikogbofo (beaded crown), Undated
16 cm x 20.7 cm x 23.3
Standard Bank African Art Collection
(Wits Art Museum)



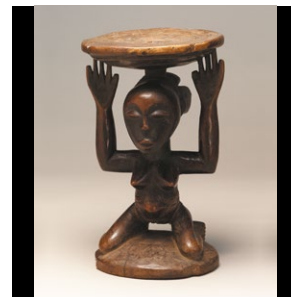
Zulu
South Africa
Ubeshwana (beaded apron); Umkhambathi (beaded apron/shawl)
Textile, fibre, textile, beads
23.5 cm x 79 cm; 48.5 cm x 74 cm
Standard Bank African Art Collection
(Wits Art Museum)

Zulu
South Africa
Amatete (beaded back apron)
Textile, beads
23.5 cm x 79 cm; 48.5 cm x 74 cm
Standard Bank African Art Collection
(Wits Art Museum)



Liphotho
South Africa
Ndebele Apron, c.1950s
Beads, hide
Standard Bank Corporate Art Collection

The Luba speaking people, who live in what was formally the Shaba province of the Democratic Republic of Congo consist of several cultural groups including the Hemba and Shankadi. There is preference for the female figure in the sculptural forms of the Luba which is largely due to the matrilineal makeup of the Luba society.



Luba-Hemba
Democratic Republic of Congo
Stool
45.2 cm x 27 cm x 26.5 cm
Standard Bank African Art Collection
(Wits Art Museum)

