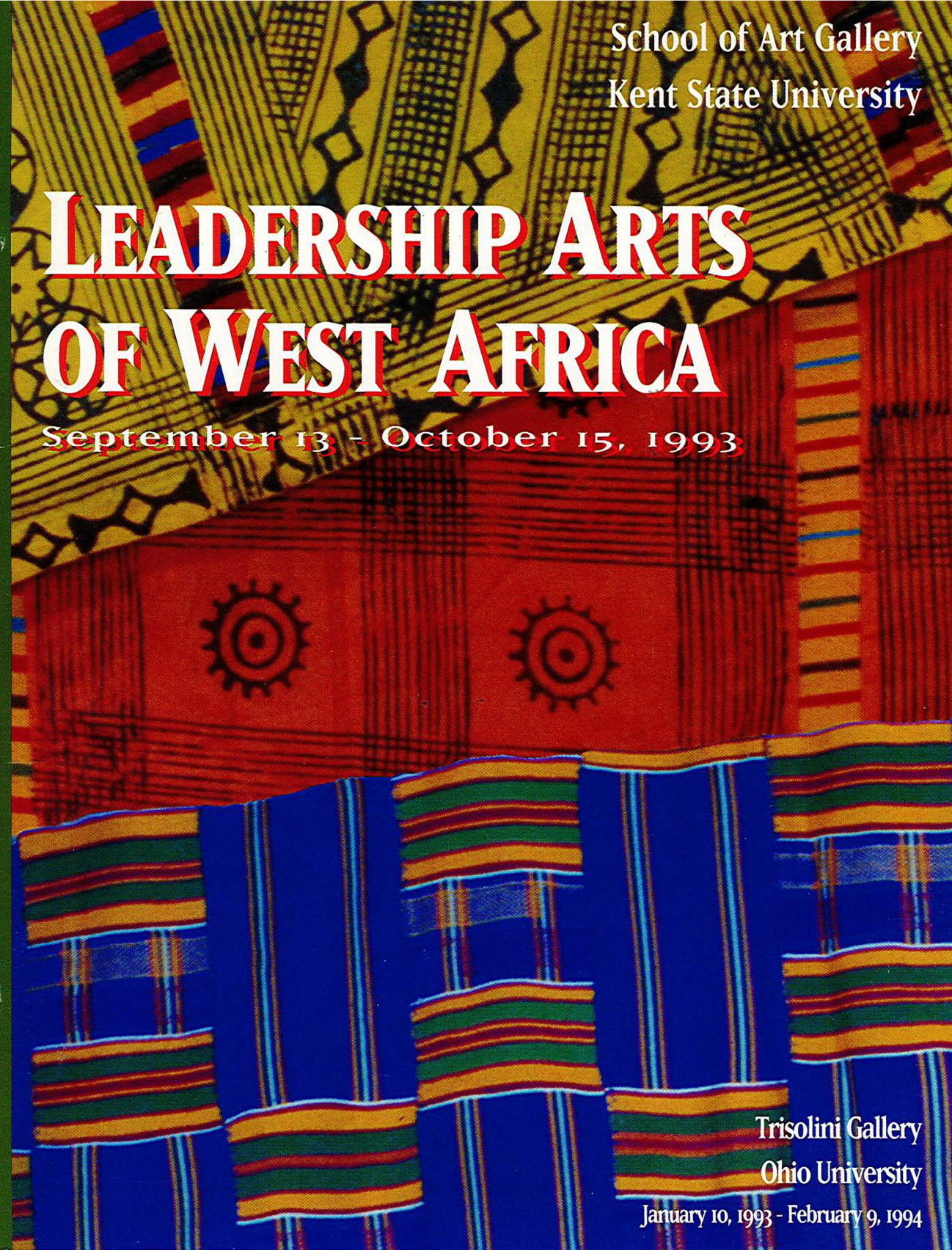
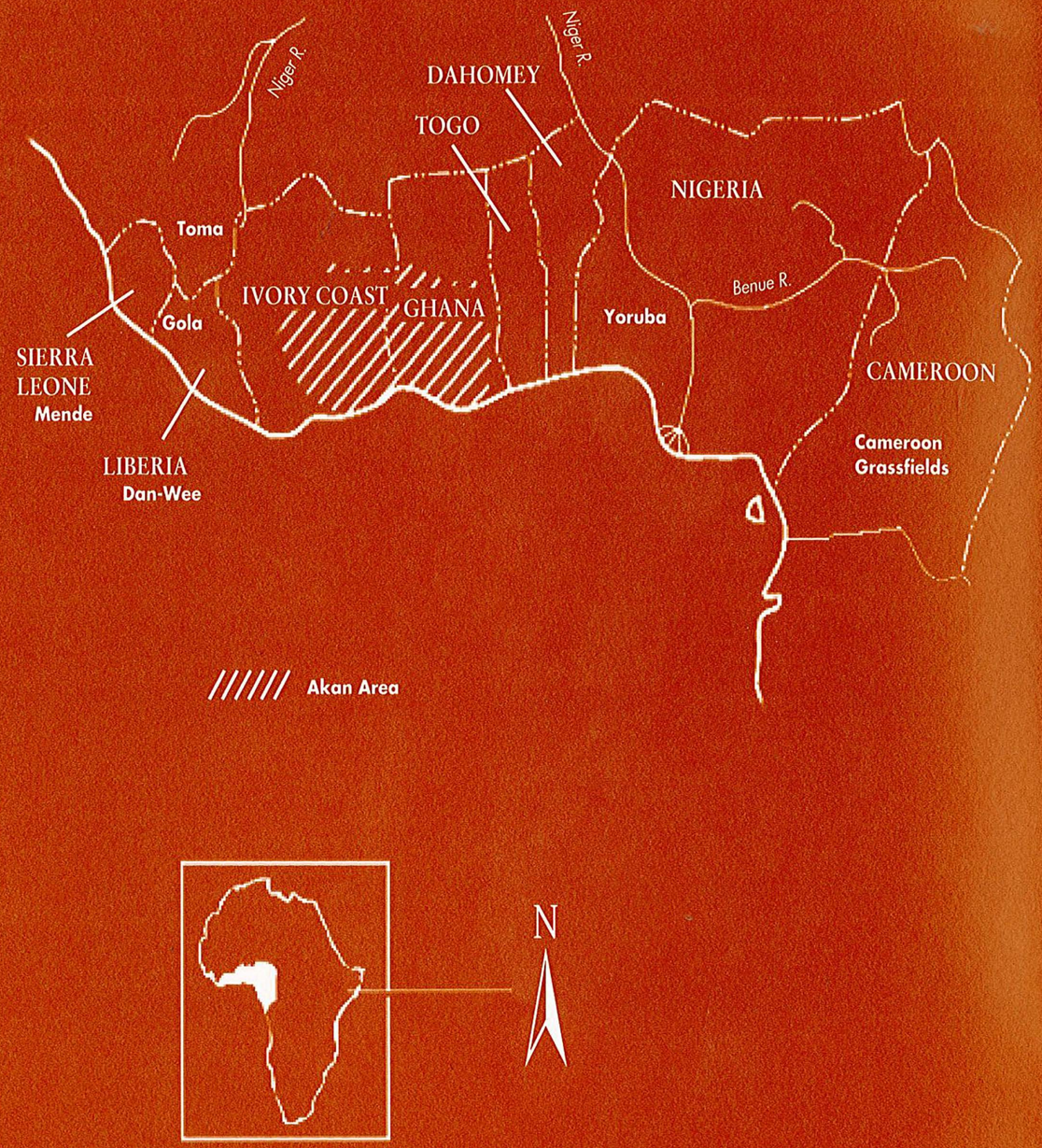
School of Art Gallery
Kent State University

LEADERSHIP ARTS OF WEST AFRICA

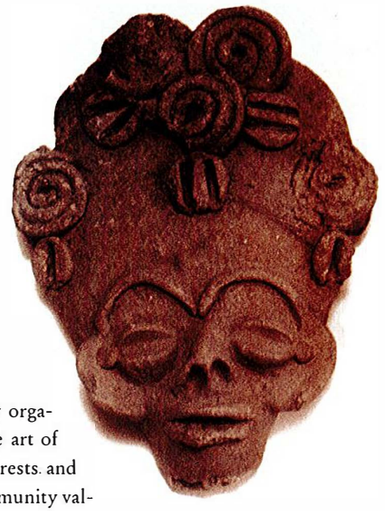
September 13 - October 15, 1993



Trisolini Gallery
Ohio University
January 10, 1993 - February 9, 1994



FOREWORD



Planning for this exhibition began in 1988, a year after the Gallery organized a successful exhibit of West African textiles and dress. The art of leadership was established as the focus because of my own interests and because it seemed to be an ideal way for discussing a range of African community values, traditions, and organizations. In order to demonstrate the diverse nature of leadership in West Africa, societies with different systems for structuring power and authority were selected. The themes, issues, and concepts of the exhibit also serve as a focus for the lectures by Martha Ehrlich, Roslyn Walker, and Judith Perani.

The exhibition, catalogue, and programming represent the support and collaboration of many individuals and organizations. First of all, I gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Ohio Arts Council and the Ohio Humanities Council in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Humanities. Additional support was provided by the Friends of the Gallery and the Kent State University Museum. I would also like to thank the Gallery staff, especially Gretchen Shie, our registrar, and Chad Dresbach, our designer. Mr. Dresbach's hard work, creativity, and humor in the face of impossible deadlines deserve special recognition. William Mithoefer, Martha Ehrlich, Judith Perani, Jim Williams, and Craig Kinzelman shared their time and knowledge with me in the organization of the exhibit and catalogue. Bill Mithoefer, in particular, has been supportive of the project since 1988. Jim Williams volunteered his time and expertise in the constructing of new display units and the solving of installation problems. I am also grateful for the advice and assistance of Mary Pat Doorley, E. Timothy Moore, and Kazadi Wa Mukuna.

Without the lenders, there would be no exhibition. Therefore, I acknowledge the cooperation of the museums and individuals listed in the catalogue's checklist. All of them generously and enthusiastically assisted in making this project an enjoyable experience.

Fred T. Smith
Gallery Director

fig. 1.

LEADERSHIP ARTS OF WEST AFRICA

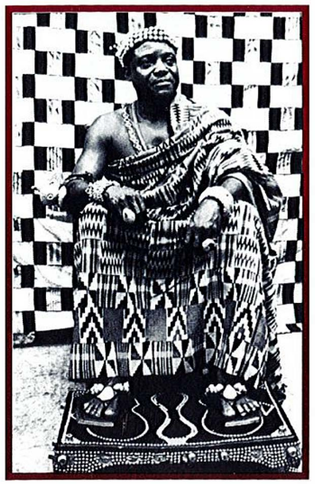


fig. 2.

The art of leadership in West Africa represents a visually rich resource for studying community values, traditions, and organizations that structure society. Leadership items include carved wooden stools, masks, and figures as well as accessories of dress such as staffs, jewelry, and hats. Special materials, motifs, and objects are often the prerogative of leaders. In Africa, art forms, which are supportive of the political system, are used in a wide range of specific activities including political ritual or drama, decision making, and law enforcement. At the same time, art symbolizes the importance of cooperation, shared beliefs, and the responsibilities of both rulers and ruled. The political structure and culture of a group determine in large part the type of political art employed. There are many different kinds of traditional leaders in West Africa and a wide range of leadership art.

Political art in centralized societies usually symbolizes and supports the authority of individual kings or chiefs. In these examples, art frequently becomes an active instrument of power. Moreover, reigning kings in West Africa are considered divine. The supernatural powers of the divine king reinforce and give efficacy to their secular authority. West African leaders, in general, have attached significance to their art forms which are imbued with deeply held and strongly shared beliefs. Among the Akan peoples of Ghana and the Ivory Coast, leadership regalia and elaborate prestige items for royals and others of high status represent an important area of artistic activity. In addition, the Akan developed an elaborate system of symbolic communication as an aspect of their visual art. A system of symbols relating to proverbs and sayings was developed to instruct, to indicate status, to criticize, and to express the nature of power. Prior to the seventeenth century, a number of Akan kingdoms existed along the coast and in south central Ghana. Various styles of terra cotta heads which commemorate the royal dead date to this time. "The distribution of these terra cottas is reasonably broad; from near Accra westward into the Ivory Coast; northward probably as far as Techiman. In much of this area they are still used or were used within living memory" (Sieber 1973:71). Heads and sometimes figures of terra cotta are associat-

fig. 3.

fig. 4.

fig. 6.

ed with royal funerary ceremonies. After participating in the ceremony, the head is taken to a shrine or to a grove for the ancestors called "place of pots." Some objects associated with royalty were either utilitarian objects, which through time became symbolic of power, or object types which were introduced from the outside, specifically from the Islamic north or from Europe. This area was first visited by the Portuguese in 1471 and by the seventeenth century, English, Dutch, and Swedish forts were established along the coast in order to facilitate trade, especially in gold.

fig. 5.

Gold has been closely associated with leadership in this part of West Africa from at least the tenth century or before. European travelers' accounts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicate the presence and importance of jewelry. Both cast and beaten gold objects were produced by professional craftsmen. At the end of the seventeeth century, Osei Tutu became chief of Kumasi and began the establishment of the Asante confederation. The symbol of Asante unity and power is the Golden Stool which came from the sky with darkness and thunder and in a thick cloud of white dust to rest gently on Osei Tutu's knee. The Golden Stool is said to contain the soul and spirit of the kingdom. The present Golden Stool is probably an accurate reproduction of the original, incorporating under its gold plates the remains of the stool which descended from the heavens (Cole and Ross 1977:138). According to Fraser,

> The most important ritual object in the Asantehene's custody, the Golden Stool is exhibited only at his installation, at durbars (royal receptions) for the highest leaders, and at recurrent ceremonies such as the Adae and Odwira festivals, occasions for the formal presentation of the king to his people...(Fraser 1972:141).

The Asante soon consolidated their kingdom and proceeded to dominate much of present day Ghana until the twentieth century. Their country was rich in gold, and although great quantities were exported for European weapons and goods, gold was used extensively to adorn and glorify Asante rulers as well as to validate their position.

Royal regalia with rich embellishment came to characterize the Asante courts. The Asantehene or Asante king and various categories of chiefs wear many items of gold such as necklaces, anklets, large armlets, and rings. Many also wear on the upper right arm geometrically shaped Islamic amulets attached to a cloth band. These amulets, consisting of leather containers covered in gold leaf, ensure good health and success in war. In addition, sandals and hats are frequently decorated with wooden forms cov-

fig. 7.

fig. 8.

ered in gold leaf. A cast or sometimes repousse gold disc is worn around the neck of the court official responsible for the spiritual well being of the king. In the literature, this person has been called the soul washer or soul priest because he is in charge of purification ceremonies for the ruler's soul. The design of each soul priest's pectoral disc is distinctive and named. One example (fig. 5) has a pattern of concentric circles called "the back of the tortoise" combined with four openwork dumbbell ornaments known as "eye of the yam." These symbolize fertility, abundance, and good luck. The ring around the center boss on this disc represents cowrie shells which are symbols of wealth and joy. Around the central boss of a repousse example are palm beetle grubs which symbolize wealth and good fortune (Ehrlich, Personal Communication 1993). Akan metal work, including gold, is characterized by both naturalistic and abstract patterns. In general, gold objects are both intricate and delicate in quality. Some bracelets of gold or of wood covered with gold leaf are based on cast brass types used in northern Ghana and introduced into Asante in the nineteenth century. Almost all Asante objects types have, in fact, originated in other Akan states or elsewhere.

The use of gold dust as currency resulted in the production of numerous brass weights for the weighing of gold dust. The system of weights was introduced from the north and based on Islamic units. It is believed that "...both the gold weighing systems and the early weights themselves were carried southward along well established trade routes, doubtless by the Mande, from the great savannah trading centers of Timbuktu and Jenne" (Cole and Ross 1978:70). The earliest forms were geometric in nature. However, the Akan soon produced figurative weights depicting objects regularly used or esteemed as well as human or animal figures relating to proverbs -- a style which is more characteristic of their system. The use of these representational weights became widespread and the forms depicted multiplied greatly. Power symbols such as state swords, shields, guns, war-horns, royal sandals, or chairs were made in comparatively large numbers. Most of the proverb weights focus on the social and political world of the Akan. These weights become symbolic of the various institutions or events they represent. In this way, they serve as messages to remind the people of the nature of the political power structure, societal responsibility, and moral conduct. The crocodile, which is an emblem of royal power, is frequently seen. Crossed crocodiles sharing the same stomach refer to a number of proverbs that emphasize unity in diversity. One example is "A family may have many members but only one belly." A family, there-

fig. 9.

fig. 10.

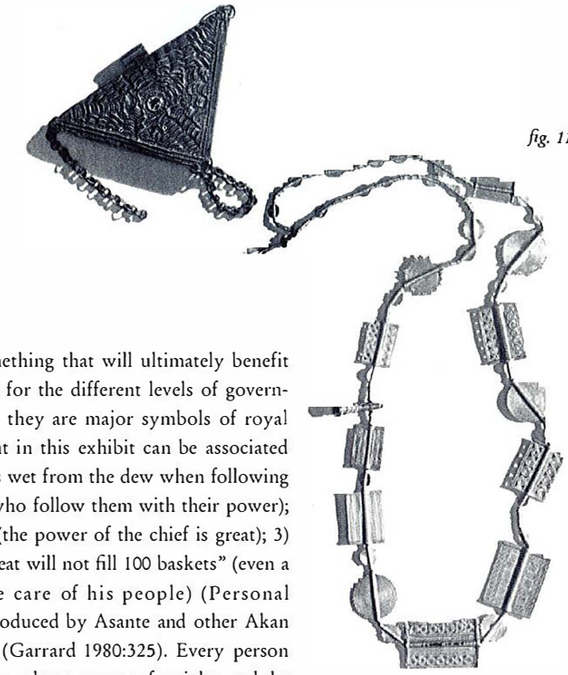


fig. 11.

fore, should cooperate rather than fight over something that will ultimately benefit them all. This same proverb also has implications for the different levels of government. Elephant gold weights are rather rare, but they are major symbols of royal power. According to Ehrlich, the elephant weight in this exhibit can be associated with the following three proverbs: "1) No one gets wet from the dew when following the trail of an elephant "(great men protect those who follow them with their power); 2) "If an elephant steps on a trap, no more trap" (the power of the chief is great); 3) "Even if an elephant is thin, that is not to say its meat will not fill 100 baskets" (even a weak leader is still powerful enough to take care of his people) (Personal Communication 1993). The number of weights produced by Asante and other Akan artists has been estimated to about three million (Garrard 1980:325). Every person engaged in trade or taxation owned or had access to at least one set of weights and the other necessary equipment such as scales, scoops, and spoons.

Two types of brass vessels are used by the Asante. The kuduo is a cast brass container for storing gold dust and other valuables that can be owned by royals and other wealthy individuals. A kuduo also has ceremonial significance. They can be buried with the dead or used in important shrines. They can also play an important role in the preparation and presentation of ritual offerings to the spirits of deceased ancestors and deities. The form and decoration of the kuduo derive from North African prototypes. Since the first European accounts, North African containers have been found being used in the Akan area. In fact, "at least six Arabic-inscribed brass vessels still exist in the Asante and Bono regions of Ghana" (Silverman 1983:11). Bands of geometric motifs decorate the exterior wall and lid of a kuduo. An early example (fig. 12) made in the northern Akan area in the fifteenth century has decoration similar to Islamic vessels. The forowa, which is a sheet brass vessel, is used for the storage of shea butter, a pomade-like cosmetic, yet it also has ritual importance. The lid and body of a forowa are decorated with geometric repousse´ and punched work.

From the sixteenth century onward, silver was imported into the Akan area. Many goldsmiths in the Asante capital of Kumasi used silver in the same man-

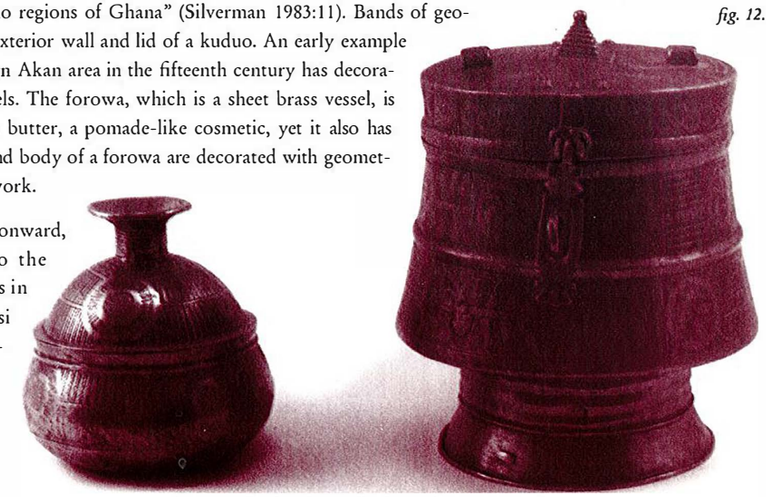


fig. 12.

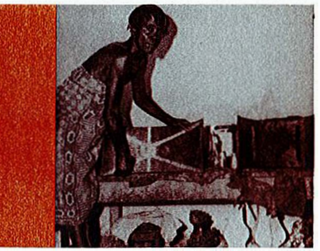


fig. 13.

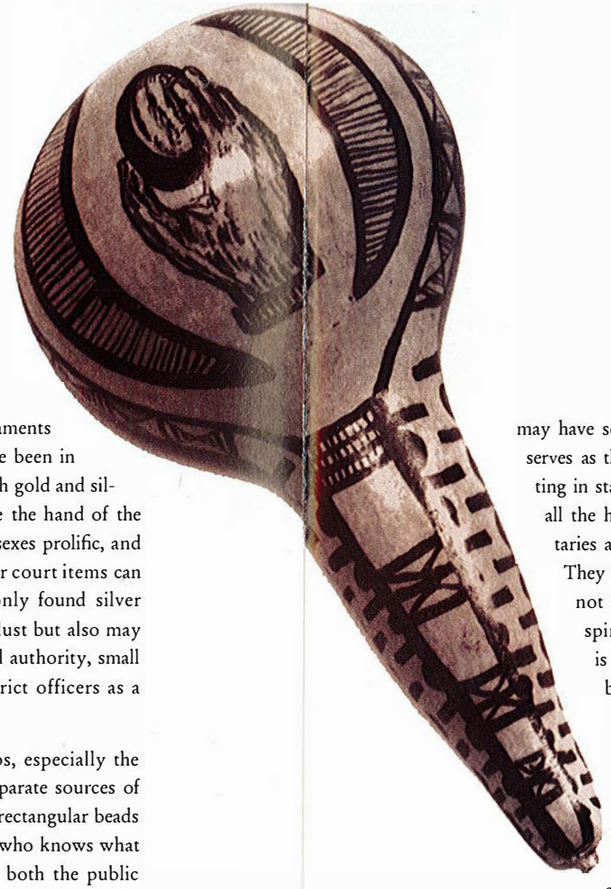


fig. 15.

ner as gold in the production of prestige objects. Gold and silver ornaments were often worn together. Silver pendants and koranic amulets have been in use since the seventeenth century. It was believed that amulets of both gold and silver would "make them invulnerable and invincible in war, paralyze the hand of the enemy, shiver their weapons, divert the course of balls, render both sexes prolific, and avert all evils..." (Bowdich 1819:271). Stools, staffs, chairs, and other court items can also be decorated with sheet silver. Spoons are the most commonly found silver object. According to Ehrlich, silver spoons could be used for gold dust but also may have been used to feed newborn children. In recognition of colonial authority, small silver "presentation" stools were given to departing colonial district officers as a farewell gift (Ehrlich, Personal Communication 1993).

Impressive gold jewelry has been produced by other Akan groups, especially the Baule of Ivory Coast. One Baule necklace assembled from three separate sources of various ages has pellet, disc, rectangular, and tusk shaped beads. The rectangular beads called bamboo door refer to power and wisdom of the chief or king who knows what is going on in public and private, like the house door which sees both the public (street) and private (house interior) side of life.

The stool is basically a utilitarian object, but it has also become an important spiritual and political symbol for the Asante. In fact, "the supreme symbol of Asante leadership on all levels of its centralized political system is the ceremonial stool (adamu dwa)" (Sieber and Walker 1987:90). Although there are different functional categories of stools, their forms are similar, consisting of a rectangular base, a curved seat, and a middle or support section with no set shape. The configuration of the middle section can indicate the status of the owner. In addition to the domestic stools, Asante rulers may have several ceremonial stools. Yet one of these is a personal stool which serves as the repository of its owner's soul. The personal stool is used for sitting in state and is carried in festivals protected by an umbrella and accorded all the honors of the ruler. The stools of chiefs and other important dignitaries are more highly decorated and larger than those of ordinary citizens. They are usually embellished with strips of gold or silver repousse'. When not occupied, a personal stool is never left upright lest some negative spirit enter the stool. When successful leaders die, their individual stool is blackened and it becomes an ancestral shrine piece. The stool is blackened with egg, blood, animal fat, and soot collected from the kitchen. These stools are kept in a special shrine room within the palace, and are brought out for major festivals. They are the focus of the dynastic traditions for each unit in the political system. In contrast to stools, chairs have no spiritual significance but are the prerogative of royalty and used on state occasions. They are modifications of seventeenth century European chair types. The most common Asante chair is the *asipim* ("I stand firm"), whose name refers to its sturdy construction but also to the stability of leadership. A great number are kept in a palace to provide seating for a gathering of chiefs or important individuals. A second chair type, the *hwedom* is also used by senior chiefs when seated in public. The *hwedom* with legs and stretchers copied from lathe-turned prototypes appear closest in form to their European origins.

fig. 14.

The linguist is an important court official for the Asante serving as the chief spokesman and an adviser to the king. As a symbol of his authority, he carries a staff covered with gold foil. The shaft is constructed of two or three parts which slot together. The finial is carved seperately. Elaborate staffs with figurative finials are a nineteenth century product of Asante expansion. Earlier staffs which were shorter and had no finial, were probably modeled after a European walking stick. Today, there is a wide range of finial images which usually depict proverbs or other verbal forms relating to power issues. One example, consisting of two men seated on stools in front of a table, refers to the following proverb, "Food belongs to the rightful owner and not to one who is hungry." Another finial, unusual because it is constructed of many separate pieces, is cited to reinforce arguments for social order. It is in the form of two men playing oware, a popular African game and illustrates the following proverbs:

fig. 16.

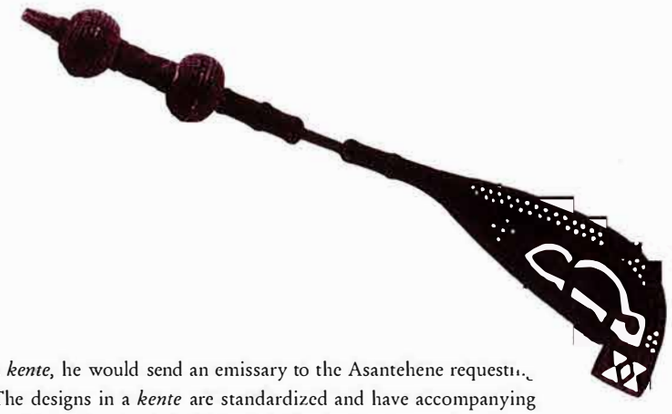
fig. 17.

"To play oware, one has to know the rules," or "A stranger does not play oware." A more complex linguist staff finial representing a man holding a gun, a snail, and a tortoise alludes to war and peace. Animals are frequently used to evoke certain qualities. The leopard symbolizes beauty and ferocity; the porcupine, courage and a fighting spirit. A famous finial image of a hand holding an egg is now being painted onto calabash cups and ladles made for the tourist trade. Traditionally, the image reminded a ruler that there are definite limits to his power by referring to the following proverb, "Having power is like holding an egg: if you hold it too tightly, you crush it, but if you hold it too loosely, it drops to the ground." Umbrellas have been an indicator of status in West Africa from at least the fourteenth century. The Asante royal umbrellas are usually large domed-shaped structures with a fringed valance and a decorative finial. The motifs of these finials are similar to those found on the linguist staffs. Whenever the Asantehene (Asante king) leaves the palace, he is covered with a spectacular umbrella, which not only protects him from the hot sun but also serves to symbolically define the spiritually cool space which surrounds him.

The Akan royal sword is characterized by a forged iron blade, often openwork, and a dumbbell-shaped handle. As an important symbol of power, the sword predates the Asante confederation. The three major types are state, courier, and shrine. State swords decorated with gold are the most critical in establishing the political and religious authority of rulers and can be seen at all festivals and important rituals. The most important swords are thought to have special spiritual significance. The "long swords" with elaborately worked blades (sometimes double), and gold covered handles with representational carvings, are used primarily for display. Swords decorated with silver are carried as a royal emblem by servants of a Queen Mother. The openwork chameleon on the blade of figure 18 refers to the proverb, "The chameleon moves slowly, but it surely gets to its destination." This means that patience and steadiness, but sure action are good qualities for a ruler to possess. Swords are also used in many different kinds of shrines as emblems of power and protection.

A spectacular type of woven, narrow-band cloth is *kente* which has been produced by the Akan since the sixteenth century. An important characteristic of *kente* is the use of silk yarn to create areas of bright color in a predominantly cotton textile. Rayon yarn has replaced silk in many recent examples. Today *kente* cloth represents the national costume of Ghana but in the past it was restricted to Akan royalty. Traditionally, if an

fig. 18.



Asante chief desired a *kente,* he would send an emissary to the Asantehene requesti.. a particular pattern. The designs in a *kente* are standardized and have accompanying names and meanings which often include historical allusions or proverbs. These designs indicate the clan, social status, and gender of the wearer. Colors are also used symbolically in *kente.* Gold, for example, is likened to a controlled fire and represents royalty, continuous life, and warmth. Another important Asante cloth is *adinkra* or "saying goodbye." Traditionally, *adinkra* was worn for mourning by Asante royalty but today it is seen on various festive occasions. *Adinkra* decoration is applied by rectangular or circular, carved calabash stamps. A thick black tar serves as the dye for these stamps. Each stamp represents a motif, basically geometric in form, which at the same time, has a symbolic meaning. Every *adinkra* cloth conveys a particular meaning, since the individual motifs combine to create the message that the wearer wishes to communicate. Many of the motifs are over a hundred years old. A popular motif called *adinkrahene* (king of adinkra) is in the form of three concentric circles. This motif, which refers to the chief or king who introduced the use of stamps, symbolizes authority, firmness, greatness, and prudence. In addition to the traditional colors of mourning — red, russet, and black, *adinkra* cloths are now created in many other colors including green, blue, purple, and yellow.

Asante royal art can best be understood in a performance context. At important festivals, various objects and items of regalia play a major role. One example is *adae,* a festival for the remembrance of late rulers. After the Asantehene makes offerings to his ancestors at their blackened stools in a palace shrine, he proceeds, dressed in rich cloth and ornaments, to a public reception. All of the trappings of office accompany him. *Odwira* is a five day festival of thanksgiving and purification. Yet it is also concerned with "reaffirming political loyalties and allegiances, reestablishing the military order and social ties, and proclaiming the unity of a state organization" (Cole 1975:12). Umbrellas, stools, swords, drums, linguist staffs, elephant tusk trumpets, jewelry, elaborate cloth, and other items of regalia can be seen during these festivals.

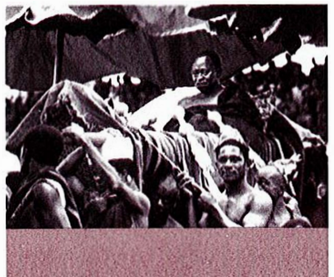


fig. 19.

Within the grassfields of the Republic of Cameroon, there are a number of kingdoms of diverse origin that share in a complex of cultural and artistic traits. These include such groups as the Bamum,

fig. 20.

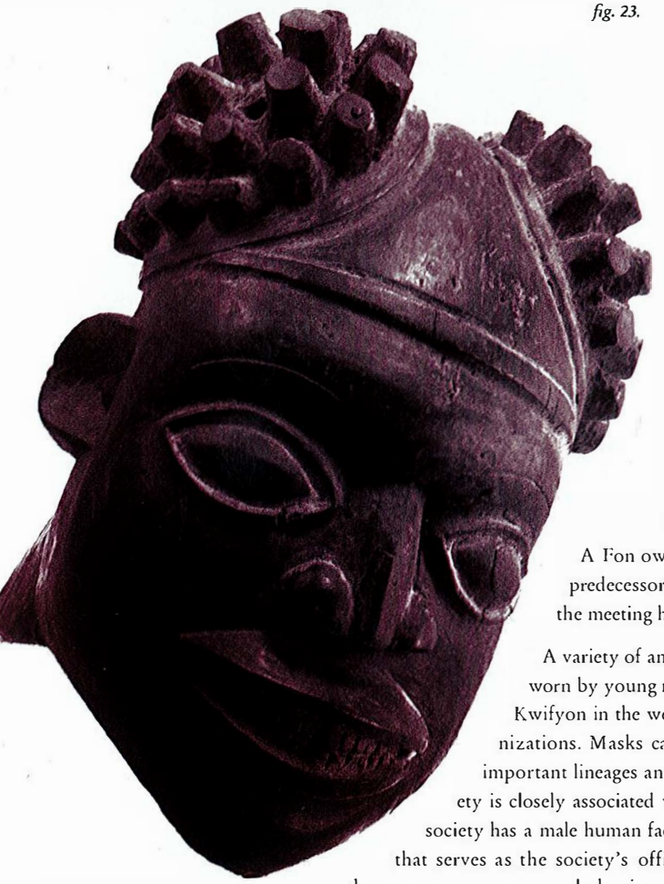
fig. 21.

Bamileke, Bafut, Kom, and Tikar. As with the Asante, the focal point of each political system is the divine king or Fon who is seen as the embodiment of all traditions and values. His palace, decorated with carved posts and doorways, is the repository of a rich assortment of artistic objects. Elaborate robes, caps, and other items of adornment define prestige and rank in these kingdoms. Their use is the prerogative of Fons and other title holders. However, the robe, or so-called "grassfields gown" was introduced into this area in the nineteenth century from northern Nigeria. A robe in the exhibit was originally owned by the Fon of Kom who gifted it to an American after the return of an important shrine carving. This figure called the *Afo-a-Kom* had been stolen from the palace, transported to New York, and offered for sale in a commercial art gallery. Royal commemorative figures, sometimes covered with beads, are housed in palace shrines and used in rituals to symbolize the continued power of deceased royals. They are recognizable as royal because of their ceremonial attire. However, the primary item of dynastic power is the stool decorated with royal symbols such as ancestors, wives, retainers, and animals. Rows of human figures or heads supporting the seat of a stool can be interpreted as indicating the popular support of the Fon. The three most common animal forms are the spider, frog, and leopard. The spider motif, sometimes resembling a net, is found on almost all prestige items. It is associated with the earth, divination, wisdom, and the ancestors. The spider is viewed as an important intermediary between the living and the ancestors. According to Northern,

fig. 22.

> Its representation on those types of prestige art customarily granted title-holders by the Fon (masks, stools, pipes, ceremonial vessels,

fig. 23.



bracelets, and sheathed swords) may signal the spider's metaphoric link with all ancestors beyond the exclusive royal context (1984:50).

A Fon owns many stools including ones used by his predecessors. These are employed in the palace and in the meeting house of the regulatory society.

A variety of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic masks are worn by young men of regulatory or palace societies, called Kwifyon in the western grassfields, and by other social organizations. Masks can also be owned by large or historically important lineages and by individual princes. A regulatory society is closely associated with the palace and king. Every regulatory society has a male human face mask, called *Mambu* or "runner mask," that serves as the society's official representative. It announces official decrees, coerces proper behavior, and can even serve as an executioner. Regulatory society masks, which support and enforce royal power, appear at major festivals and funerals. In addition, some masks may have specific social or political functions such as settling disputes. Human helmet masks with elaborately carved caps represent individuals of high rank. Attached prestige materials, such as shells, beads, or brass, further indicate high status. The majority of animal masks symbolize attributes of leadership or power itself. Both the leopard and elephant are closely identified leadership. The Fon is often referred to and addressed as either elephant or leopard. Geary notes that "In Bamum, the analogy between the remarkable strength, speed, and ferocity of the leopard and the qualities of the king finds expression in the king being addressed as "leopard" (as well as "elephant" and "lion") (1981:41). Since the elephant is a powerful royal icon, its appearance as a mask is relatively rare. The buffalo mask, on the other hand, is widely used by both regulatory societies and by societies associated with hunting. They represent royal privilege and authority but also

fig. 24.

fig. 25.

fer of power from generation to generation and from Fon to village chief. Wooden headdress masks depicting a bird and worn with feather costumes are also said to reflect prestige. In a number of West African cultures, birds are associated with kingship and/or witchcraft.

Horns of various animals are used for drinking palm wine. Uncarved horns are the earliest type. Every Fon or king keeps the drinking horns of his predecessors and commissions new ones. When appearing in public, especially for important occasions, a Fon will hold a drinking horn in his left hand. A king will also be buried with one of his horns. Today, many of these horns are elaborately carved with a variety of symbolic motifs. Carved horns are also used by Fons as gifts to others of high status. Bamum is a major producer of these horns. Human figures, human heads, and mythological animals are the most common figurative elements. Humans usually refer to kings or their retainers. Frog or lizard motifs, usually difficult to distinguish from each other, are considered symbols of fertility (Kinzelman n.d.:12). Geometric designs often make reference to plants or animals. When men are gathered in the palace or society lodges, the drinking of palm wine from an embellished horn, especially one received from a Fon, carries considerable prestige. Tobacco pipes with brass, or more commonly, terracotta bowls and long wooden stems are also owned by men of status. "As regalia of Fons and title holders, they were indispensable personal prestige items, cared for, carried after their owners by retainers, and displayed as status indicators on ceremonial occasions" (Northern 1984:120). Some of the bowls are in the shape of a seated figure; others, depict animals or human heads. Pipe stems are richly carved with geometric or figurative symbols of authority.

The Yoruba states, located primarily in southwestern Nigeria, date back to the eleventh century and the ancient city of Ife. The Yoruba are a centralized and urbanized society. Each Yoruba state is ruled by a king chosen by senior chiefs from the appropriate royal lineage. Although a Yoruba king is powerful, a number of significant political or socio-political organizations are able to balance the power of any particular ruler. The main attribute and symbol of kingship is a beaded crown called "ade". The beaded crown connotes power and embodies the essence of kingship.

fig. 26.

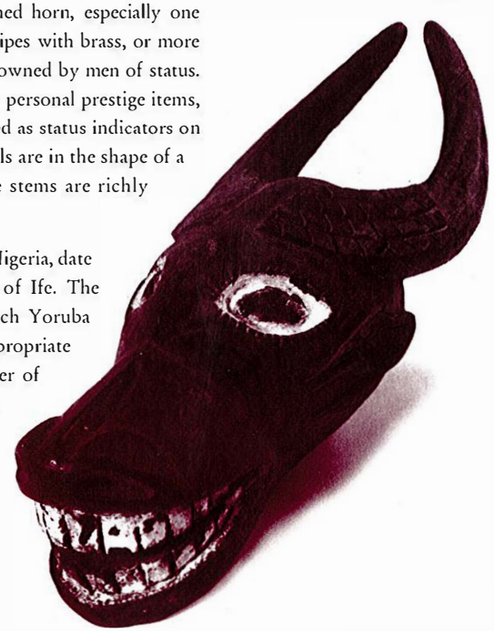
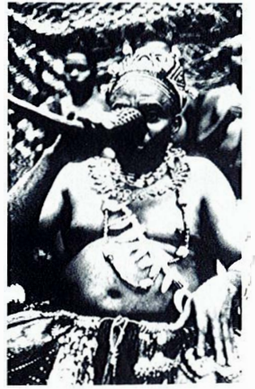


fig. 27.



The bead-embroidered crown with beaded veil, foremost attribute of the traditional leaders (Oba) of the Yoruba people of West Africa, symbolizes the aspirations of a civilization at the highest level of authority. The crown incarnates the intuition of royal ancestral force, the revelation of great moral insight in the person of the king, and the glitter of aesthetic experience (Thompson, 1970: 227).

A new crown is made at the installation of each king, but some beads from the crown of his predecessor are included in order to preserve the dynastic link. Although certain details may vary, the basic form cannot. A Yoruba crown is conical in shape and includes a beaded fringe veil, a bird on top, and a frontal face motif. The veil obscures the face of the living king, while the face motif represents the dynastic ancestors. The wearing of elaborate beaded apparel is the prerogative of kings and those who communicate with or become possessed by the gods. Upon the death of a twin, a small wooden figure (*ibeji*) may be carved to honor the deceased. The continued care of the image is the responsibility of the mother. When a royal twin dies, a special beaded garment is ordered from the crown maker to adorn the *ibeji* figure. Shango, the legendary fourth king of ancient Oyo, is the Yoruba thunder deity. His reign came to an end after considerable misuse of power when he devastated his capital by severe thunderstorms. His devotees today dance with small staffs in the form of a double axe, which represents thunder stones. At this time, a devotee may be mounted or possessed by Shango. To demonstrate the benefits received from this powerful royal deity, Shango priests wear cowrie shell vests, which allude to great wealth. The *ibeji* figure for a deceased twin dedicated to Shango will also wear a cowrie shell vest.

Although the focus of authority is the king, there are a number of organizations in each state that exert significant political and spiritual power. Within some Yoruba states, especially those influenced by the kingdom of Oyo, the Ogboni or Osugbo society balances the power of the king. The Ogboni, a society of male and female elders, operates within an aura of secrecy, has ritual function and judicial authority, and is connected with the election, installation, and removal of the king. According to Biobaku, "...the Ogboni stood between the sacred chief and his subjects, preventing the one from becoming despotic and ensuring the

fig. 28.

proper subordination of the other" (1952: 38). An important symbol of Ogboni is the *edan,* twined brass images joined by a chain. These represent the male and female members of the society and are displayed during major ceremonies or worn around the neck of members. An *edan* is usually made for a member at the time of initiation into the society. Another important item of Ogboni equipment is the *agba,* a drum, which is beaten with canes to announce Ogboni meetings or judicial activities. Among the southwestern Yoruba, especially the Ijebu Yoruba, the Oro society also has significant political functions. It cooperates with Ogboni and often carries out its decisions. The wide range of images that crown the superstructure of Oro masks refer to the great communal responsibilities of Oro. Drewal has noted that "The imagery may be entertaining, but its underlying message is that 'what goes around, comes around' - or all things will eventually come to light" (1989:144). Figures between two horns, for example, are said to represent victims of Oro executions. These figures are sometimes upside down or sideways.

fig. 29.

Egungun masquerades honor ancestors and, at the same time, serve as important status symbols for the living. The Yoruba believe that a continuous and reciprocal relationship unites those who are deceased with those still in this world. Members of Egungun represent the corporate spirit of the Yoruba dead. The Yoruba word for ancestor translates as "being from beyond." Kinship affiliation is an important political and economic force in the Yoruba system. Lineage ancestors are honored during annual festivals which consist of a series of rituals performed over several weeks. During this time, many different masquerade types appear in a town and some visit lineage compounds in order to bless or punish the inhabitants. Even the king must seek the help of the ancestors for the coming year. These festivals occur throughout the area, but regional differences are evident. Costuming is extremely diverse, reflecting the wide range of concerns and regional variants of the association. Both wooden and non-wooden masks are used. One type from the city of Abeokuta is called the elephant Egungun or *Egungun erin* because of its grandness. It consists of a wooden helmet mask with a beard,

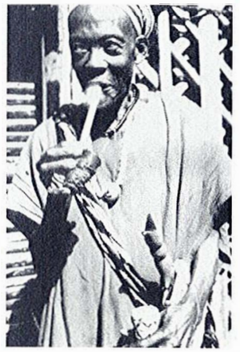


fig. 30.

fig. 31.

bared teeth, and long ears. The long ears are often decorated with an interlace pattern which refers to royalty. Calabash containers of magic on the forehead and a rabbit and pressure drum between the ears symbolize specific realms of power. According to Wolff,

> Erin, the Yoruba word for 'elephant,' refers not only to the large size of the mask and the highly exaggerated upstanding ears, but also to the social prestige and wealth of the owner, who must spend a great deal of money costuming the masquerader each year (1981:110).

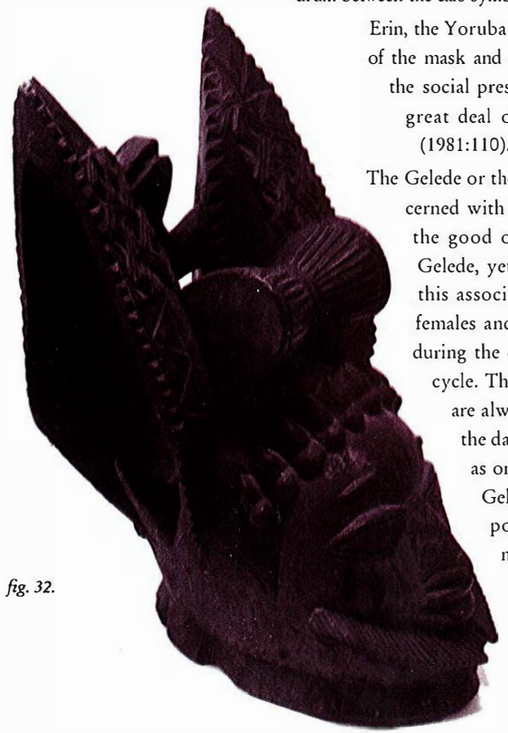


fig. 32.

The Gelede or the Efe-Gelede association of the southwestern Yoruba is concerned with harnessing the potentially destructive power of women for the good of the community. Males and elderly women belong to Gelede, yet it is the women who control the association. By means of this association, men are able to overtly express the importance of females and female fertility to the society. The annual festival is held during the early rains of the spring and the start of a new agricultural cycle. The Efe ceremonies, during which "the Mothers" are praised, are always held at night while the Gelede masqueraders perform in the daylight hours. Only a few masks are associated with Efe such as one in the exhibit, illustrated on the back cover. The masks of Gelede, which are worn by men during daytime ceremonies, portray on their superstructure almost limitless images of many facets of the life experience. In fact, "the range of subjects is as diffuse as social experience, for the supernatural powers of "the Mothers" for whom Gelede is performed, is attentive to every aspect of social life" (Fagg and Pemberton 1982: 138). On top of one mask in the exhibit (fig 34) a courtroom scene is depicted. In this example, a guard armed with a modern rifle, leads two chained prisoners before a judge who is seated at a table and holding a gavel. Even the contemporary power structure is handled by Gelede. In terms of sculpture, there is a concern with beauty and power. It is believed by the Yoruba that beauty is an ultimate weapon against the forces of destruction. In the northeastern area of Yorubaland, the Epa mask performs in festivals honoring individuals important to the history of a lineage or town. Cultural achievement and community values underlie the event. The festival

fig. 34.

also stresses the transformation of young men into strong adults able to perform difficult tasks. The Epa is a pot-shaped helmet form with an elaborate superstructure portraying an extensive range of human and animal subjects. A common motif is that of a mother with children or a mother of twins. Again, the vital and sometimes concealed power of women is publicly recognized.

In noncentralized or polycephalous societies, councils of elders, masking associations, and a variety of religious leaders are charged with the major decision making and enforcement of community responsibilities. When chiefs exist, their power is limited by these other organizations. Among a number of ethnic groups in eastern Sierra Leone and western Liberia — such as Mende, Temne, Gola, Vai, and Bassa, two major secret societies exert considerable political, social, and economic power. The Poro, a male association, makes most major political and judicial decisions. Only a few wooden masks function within Poro and these play a minor role. One example is the *Gongoli,* a distorted or exaggerated wooden face form that plays the buffoon and provides comic relief while engaging in socially significant satire. Moreover, "he may with impunity criticize and ridicule such persons as chiefs and in his uninhibited fashion he may reveal and comment on those things that must remain unspoken in the normal course of daily life" (Siegmann and Perani 1976: 46). The powerful bush spirits of Poro are non-wooden, composed of fur, leather, cloth, raffia fiber, and yarn. These spirits do not have specific functions but symbolize the powerful forces of nature which Poro controls. As Poro has spread north to groups with ties to the interior, wooden masks become important. Among the Toma people, a face type with large nose, heavy horizontal brow, and horns alludes to the power of the wilderness and is used at poro initiations and funerals.

fig. 33.

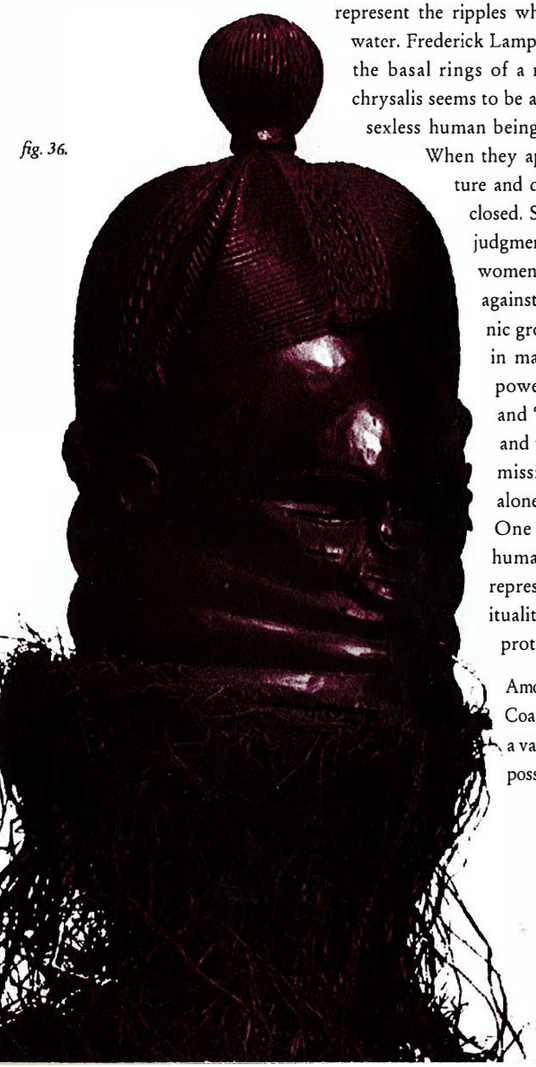
For women, the Sande society lays down rules of conduct, proscribes certain rules of behavior, and educates young girls for an accepted pattern of life. European reports as early as the sixteenth century mention women's societies in this area. Sande is an unusual African association because wooden masks are worn exclusively by women. These blackened helmet masks, which represent spirits, are characterized by rings of fat around the neck and an elaborate coiffure. The black color alludes to either the

fig. 35.

fig. 36.

river-dwelling spirit identified with the mask or to feminine beauty. The neck rings are also considered a sign of beauty, as well as wealth and high status. For some, the rings represent the ripples which are created when the Sande spirit emerges from the water. Frederick Lamp, on the other hand, believes that the rings actually suggest the basal rings of a moth/butterfly chrysalis. "The metamorphosis of the chrysalis seems to be a perfect metaphor for the transformation of immature and sexless human beings into beautiful and powerful women" (Lamp 1985:32). When they appear, these spirits speak in a nonverbal language of gesture and dance. In this regard, the mouth of the mask is small and closed. Silence is said to be an indication of composure and sound judgment. Among the Gola, these masks are said to represent the women's water spirit husbands who judge males that transgress against Sande laws protecting women's rights. Among other ethnic groups in the area, the spirit is feminine but partially clothed in male attire in order to enhance her identity as a figure of power. Among the Gola, the black helmet mask is called *sowei,* and "a women who reaches a particular level within the Sande and who has demonstrated particular dancing skills may commission a mask which becomes her exclusive property. She alone may evoke the spirit of her mask " (Siegmann 1977:7). One of their roles is to maintain cooperation between the human and spiritual worlds. The mask and its various parts represent Sande ideals and concepts of beauty, power, and spirituality. In addition, the spirits initiate girls into adulthood and protect the communal interests of women.

fig. 36.



Among the ethnic groups of eastern Liberia and the western Ivory Coast, especially the Dan, Wee, and Mano, wooden masks perform a variety of functions. These masks derive their authority from the possession of supernatural power. Therefore,

> ...a spirit is said to come to a man through a dream or vision revealing itself and instructing the man to go and make a costume and commission a mask to be carved. Each mask is a separate being, and despite attempts by scholars to classify and categorize them according to type, each is an identifiable, individualized personality with its own name, character traits, and personality. Each mask therefore has its own spirit, owner, and quality (Seigmann 1977:21).

fig. 38.

In contrast to Poro, the masking associations of the Dan, Wee, and Mano peoples of eastern Liberia and the western Ivory Coast are less structured and more egalitarian. Moreover, villages here are basically independent unlike the more centralized systems in the Poro/Sande area. The masking associations are controlled by a council of elders who are the real holders of power in the community. Masks are used in initiation, war, social control, as well as in judicial and entertainment activities. The manifestation of supernatural power is not complete for the masks until they are worn by a particular person in a ritual or social control context. For example, a mask may act as a judge between individuals, families, villages, clans, or even different ethnic groups. Normal civil disputes are settled by a clan leader or a town chief, but when disputes are serious and threaten the entire fabric of social life in the community, a mask may be called out. Moreover, a mask can change its particular function depending on the current status of its owner. It is, therefore, impossible to determine the precise meaning of a mask without specific field data. In terms of style, the masks of this area range from highly polished and naturalistic types to expressive and cubistic examples. Some masks are almost entirely covered with additive materials — such as hair, animal horns, shot gun shells, tusks, and teeth — in order to increase their supernatural powers.

fig. 39.

fig. 40.

Small masks or masquettes (*ma go*) which embody protective spirits are also found among the Dan, Wee, and Mano. These are usually copies of full-sized masks whose spirit may be contacted by manipulating the masquette. In one account,

> "Every morning, in secret, the owner takes out his ma, spits on its face, rubs its forehead against his own and says, 'You there, good morning. Don't let any witch come to me. So be it' (Schwab 1947:365).

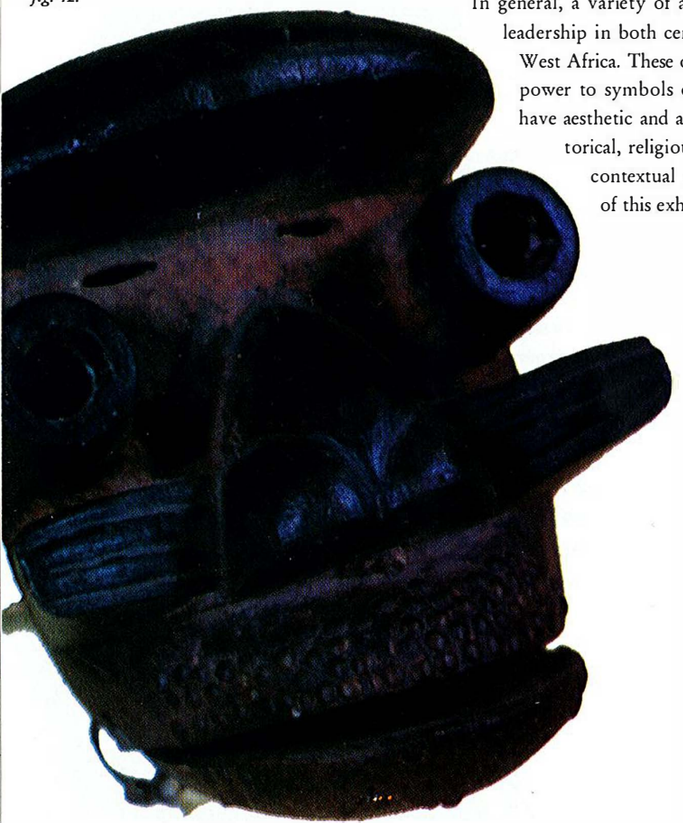
In some cases, the larger mask no longer exists. In the literature, these small masks have been called "passports" because they identify the owner as a senior

fig. 41.

member of the masking association who is under the protection of a powerful spirit. In this capacity they are symbols of rank and authority. The ma go can also be used as a sacred object for swearing an oath or offering a sacrifice. The majority of the masquettes are of the slit-eyed naturalistic style.

Another prestige object in this area is the large ladle owned and carried by a special kind of women called a *wunkirle*. She is considered to be the most generous and hospitable woman of her village quarter. At festivals, she will dance with the ladle as she provides gifts of food to both guests and strangers. A *wunkirle* achieves this position because she and her husband are industrious and successful farmers.

fig. 42.



In general, a variety of art forms define and support traditional leadership in both centralized and noncentralized societies of West Africa. These objects which range from embodiments of power to symbols of authority or emblems of achievement have aesthetic and artistic purposes, but also function in historical, religious, philosophical, and political ways. The contextual meaning of such objects is a major focus of this exhibition.

Fred T. Smith
Gallery Director and Coordinator of
Art History

PHOTOGRAPH CAPTIONS

FIG. 1
Ghana; Akan
Terra Cotta Funerary Heads
Collection: William C. Mithoefer

FIG. 2
Ghana; Akan
Chief Wearing Kente Cloth and Jewelry
photo by Dennis Warren,published in *African Arts*, 1975

FIG. 3
Ghana; Asante
The Golden Stool
photo: Embassy of Ghana publication

FIG. 4
Ghana; Asante
Linguist Staff Finial
Collection: William C. Mithoefer

FIG. 5
Ghana; Asante
Armlet and Bracelet
Collection: MarthaEhrlich

FIG.6
Ghana; Asante
Gold Discs Worn by a "Soul Priest"
Collection: Martha Ehrlich

FIG. 7
Ghana; Asante
Gold Dust Weights
Collections: William C. Mithoefer and Fred T. Smith

FIG. 8
Ghana; Asante
Gold Dust Weights
Collections: William C. Mithoefer and Fred T. Smith

FIG. 9
Ghana; Asante
Gold Dust Weights
Collection: Martha Ehrlich

FIG. 10
Ghana; Asante
Linguist Staff Finial
Collection: William C. Mithoefer

FIG. 11
Ghana/Ivory Coast left, Asante
Silver Amulet right, Baule Necklace
Collection: Martha Ehrlich

FIG. 12
Ghana; Asante
Kuduo Vessels left, 15th century example from the Martha Ehrlich Collection right, 19th century example from the Roy and Sophie Sieber Collection

FIG. 13
Ghana; Asante
Blackened Stool in Palace Shrine
photo: Ghana Information Services, published in *Arts of Ghana*, 1988

FIG.14
Ghana; Asante
Royal Stool
Collection: William C. Mithoefer

FIG. 15
Ghana;.Asante
Modern Calabash Ladle and Spoon Decorated with the Image of a Linguist Staff Finial
Collection: Fred T. Smith

FIG. 16
Ghana; Akan
Dutch Painting of a Sword Bearer Painted in 1611
photo: postcard from Copenhagen Museum

FIG. 17
Ghana; Asante
Royal Ceremonial Sword;handle of bird with cannons and powder kegs.
Collection: William C. Mithoefer

FIG. 18
Ghana; Asante
Ceremonial Sword
Collection: Martha Ehrlich

FIG. 19
Ghana; Asante
Asantehene being Carried and Flanked by Sword Bearers
photo: Carolyn Bassing published in *African Arts*, 1972

FIG. 20
Cameroon Grassfields; Kom
Chief's Gown
Collection: Craig Kinzelman

FIG. 21
Cameroon Grassfields; Bamileke
Stool with Spider Motif
Collection: Craig Kinzelman

FIG. 22
Ghana; Asante
Kente Cloth
Collection: K.S.U. School of Art Gallery, Gift of William C. Mithoefer

FIG. 23
Cameroon Grassfields; Bamileke
Helmet Mask
Collection: Roy and Sophie Sieber

FIG. 24
Cameroon Grassfields
Early 20th century Photograph of Fon Njoya of Bamum Seated on his Royal Throne
photo: Franz Thorbecke published in Geary 1981:37

FIG. 25
Cameroon Grassfields; Bamileke
Regulatory Society Masqueraders
photo: Paul Gebauer

FIG. 26
Cameroon Grassfields; Bamileke
Buffalo Mask
Collection: Craig Kinzelman

FIG. 27
Cameroon Grassfields; Bamum
Chief drinking from a horn

FIG. 28
Cameroon Grassfields; Bamileke
Drinking Horn
Collection: Craig Kinzelman

FIG.29
Cameroon Grassfields; Bamum
Clay Pipe Bowls with Wooden Stems
Collection: William C. Mithoefer

FIG. 30
Cameroon Grassfields; Bamum
Elder Smoking Decorative Clay Pipe
photo: Paul Gebauer, published in *African Arts*, 1972

FIG. 31
Nigeria; Yoruba Gelede Society
Masquerader
photo: Henry Drewal, published in *African Arts*, 1974

FIG. 32
Nigeria; Yoruba Egungun Society
Erin or Elephant Mask
Collection: William C. Mithoefer

FIG. 33
Nigeria; Yoruba
Gelede Society Mask
Collection: Gene Blocker

FIG, 34
Mgeria; Yoruba
Oro Society Mask
Collection: Trisolini Gallery,Ohio University

FIG. 35
Sierra Leone/Liberia; Temne Sande Society Initiation
photo: Frederick Lamp, published in *African Arts*, 1985

FIG. 36
Liberia; Toma
Poro Society Mask
Collection: Judith Perani

FIG. 37
Sierra Leone/Liberia Mende Sande Society
Mask
Collection: Kent State University, School of Art Gallery, gift of William C. Mithoefer

FIG. 38
Sierra Leone/Liberia;
Gola Sande Society Mask
Collection: Kent State University, School of Art Gallery, gift of Peter Klaus

FIG. 39
Sierra Leone; Mende
Poro Society Gongoli Mask
Collection: Gene Blocker

FIG. 40
Liberia/Ivory Coast
Dan Style Mask and Costume

FIG. 41
Liberia/Ivory Coast
Dan style mask
Collection: Indiana University Art Museum

FIG. 42
Liberia/Ivory Coast
Wee style mask
Collection: Miami University Art Museum, Oxford, Ohio

PG. 23
Liberia/Ivory Coast; Dan/Wee
Masquettes
Collection: William C. Mithoefer

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LEADERSHIP ARTS OF WEST AFRICA CHECKLIST

Key to Collections:

- CK **Craig Kinzelman**; Athens, Ohio
- CMA-E **Cleveland Museum of Art**, Educational Extensions.
- GB **Gene Blocker**; Athens, Ohio.
- JP **Judith Perani**; Athens, Ohio.
- ME **Martha Ehrlich**; Edwardville, Illinois.
- PG **P.W. Goodweather**; Akron, Ohio.
- TOU **Trisolini Gallery**, Ohio University; Athens, Ohio.
- CMA **Cleveland Museum of Art**.
- FTS **Fred T. Smith**; Kent, Ohio.
- IU **Indiana University Art Museum**; Bloomington, Indiana.
- KSG **Kent Stote University School of Art Gallery**; Kent, Ohio.
- MU **Miami University Art Museum**; Oxford, Ohio. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph E. Bresler.
- RS **Roy and Sophie Sieber**; Bloomington, Indiana.
- WM **William C. Mithoefer**; Chevy Chase, Maryland.

GHANA:

Asante. Kente Cloth (gold). KSG, Gift of William C. Mithoefer.
-- Kente Cloth (blue). KSG, Gift of William C. Mithoefer
-- Kente Cloth (green). KSG, Gift of William C. Mithoefer.
-- Kente Cloth. MU.
-- Adrinko Cloth. MU.
-- Cast Gold Soul Priest's Disc. ME.
-- Sheet Gold Alloy Repousse Soul Priest's Disc, ME.
-- Necklace of 50 Beads. ME.
-- Repousse Sheet Silver Repousse Silver Crescent Moon Pendant. ME.
-- Talisman. ME.
-- Chief's Large Hinged 2-Piece Wood Bracelet. ME.
-- Two Hollow Cast Rings. ME.
-- Linguist's Staff Finial Covered With Gold. ME
-- 3 Swords, ME.
-- Silver Spoon. ME.
-- 5 Brass Spoons. ME.
-- Brass Gold Handling Equipment. ME.
-- Brass Scales. ME.
-- Brass Spoon. ME.
-- Brass Spoon. ME.
-- Adrinko Cloth. MF.
-- Armlet. ME.
-- 20 Figurative Weights. ME.
-- 29 Geometric Weights. ME.
-- 3 Gold Dust Weights. CMA-E, The Harold T. Clark Educational Extension.
-- Gold Dust Box. CMA-E, Sundry Purchase Fund.
-- Gold Dust Spoon. CMA-E, The Harold T. Clark Educational Extension.
-- Asipim Choir. TOU.
-- 2 Kuduo. RS.
-- Blackened Stool. RS.
-- 5 Figurative Weights. RS.
-- Cylindrical "Gold Dust" Container. RS.
-- Farowa. RS.
-- Queen Mother Figure. RS.
-- Stool. RS.
-- 21 Geometric Weights. WM.
-- 12 Figurative Weights. WM.
-- 2 Linguist's Staff Finials. WM.
-- Armlet with Horns. WM.

Asante. Armlet. WM.
-- Triangular Necklace. WM.
-- Gold Bracelet. WM.
-- 3 Combs. WM.
-- Warrior Figure Weight. WM.
-- 2 Fly Whisks. WM.
-- 2 Farowa. WM.
-- Mudfish Ring. WM.
-- 2 Bird Rings. WM.
-- Staff Finial-Hand. WM.
-- 2 Hats. WM.
-- 1 Pair Modern Shoes. WM.
-- Terra Cotta Head. WM.
-- 1 Pair Old Shoes. WM.
-- Staff with Figure Climbing a Tree. WM.
-- Kuduo. WM.
-- Leopard Foot Stool. WM.
-- Leopard Stool. WM.
-- Double Blade Sword. WM.
-- Bird and Canon Sword. WM.
-- Turtle Stool. WM.
-- Stool with Metal Strips. WM.
-- 2 Kente Cloths. WM.
-- Hwedam. Choir. WM.
-- 2 Figurative Weights. FTS.
-- 2 Brass Boxes. FTS.
-- 2 Brass Spoons. FTS.
-- Calabash with Handle. FTS.
-- Calabash. FTS.

Akan/Asante. Silver Presentation Stool. ME.

Akan. 3 Figurative Weights. ME.
-- 1 Geometric Weight. ME.
-- Kuduo. ME.
-- Thin Cast Bronze Spoon. ME.
-- Terra Cotta Head. CMA.
-- Terra Cotta Head. CMA.
-- Pot. JP.
-- 2 Terra Cotta Heads. WM.
-- Terra Cotta Head. TOU.
-- Stool. WM.

CAMEROON GRASSFIELDS:

Beaded Figure. MU.
Face Mask. MU.
Brass Pipe with Wood Insert. CMA-E, The Harold T. Clark Educational Extension.
Cow Mask. CMA.
Pipe Bowl. CMA.
2 Face Masks. TOU.
Drinking Horn. CK.
Stool. CK.
2 Bushcow Masks. CK.
Face Mask. CK.
2 Plain Horns. CK.
Non-Figurative Drinking Horn. CK.
Drinking Horn with Lizard. CK.
Drinking Horn with Figures. CK.
2 Spider Stools. CK.
Pipe with Stem. CK.
Elephant Mask. CK.
Mambu Mask. CK.
Bird Mask. CK.
Kwifu Gang. CK.
Spider Pot with Lid. CK.
Royal Indigo Ndop Cloth. CK.
Calabash with Royal Scenes. CK.
Cap/Hat. CK.
19th Century Mask. RS.
3 Pipes. WM.
Mask. WM.

Bamun. Mask. CMA-E, The Harold T. Clark Educational Extension.--Stool. CK

Kom. Chief's Robe and Skirt. CK.

SIERRA LEONE/LIBERIA:

Mende. Chief's Cloth. JP.
-- Poro/Gangala Mask. GB.
-- Poro/Gbetu Mask. WM.
-- Sande Society Helmet Mask. KSG, Gift of William C. Mithoefer.
-- Sande Society Helmet Mask. KSG, Gift of William C. Mithoefer. Mano. Maskette. WM

Gola. Sande Society Helmet Mask. KSG, Gift of Peter Klaus.

Bassa. Sande Society Helmet Mask. KSG, Gift of William C. Mithoefer.

Vai. Sande Society Helmet Mask. KSG, Gift of William C. Mithoefer.

Toma. Mask. JP.

IVORY COAST:

Baule. Necklace of 55 Cast Gold Beads. ME.
-- Necklace of 41 Brass Beads. ME.
-- Necklace of 27 Cast Brass Beads. ME.
-- Woman's Wood Hair Comb. ME.
-- 2 Center Roundels From Seats of Asante Stools. ME.
-- 2 Brass Necklaces. CMA-E, Gallery Group Fund.

Akan or Baule. Brass Scales. ME.

LIBERIA/IVORY COAST:

Dan. Mask. CMA-E, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Russell Harkins.
-- Rice Spoon. CMA-E, The Harold T. Clark Educational Extension.
-- Mask. IU.
-- Mask. JP.

Dan/Wee. Mask. MU.
-- Mask. MU.
-- Mask. JP.

Wee. Mask. WM.
-- Six Masquettes. WM.

Kpelle. Mask. JP.

Ngere/Wobe. Mask. CMA-E, The Harold T. Clark Educational Extension.

NIGERIA:

Yoruba. Gelede Mask. MU.
-- Ogboni Society Brass Edan. CMA-E, The Harold T. Clark Educational Extension.
-- Gelede Mask. CMA-E, The Harold T. Clark Educational Extension.
-- Shango Staff. CMA-E, The Harold T. Clark Educational Extension.
-- Gelede Mask with Snakes. CMA.
-- Gelede Ogboni Drum. CMA.
-- Ora Mask. TOU.
-- Ogboni Figures (2). TOU.
-- Epa Mask. TOU.
-- Cloth. JP.
-- Gelede with Court Scene Mask. GB.
-- Gelede/Efe Mask. GB.
-- Egungun. WM.
-- Ogboni. WM.
-- Ogboni Bracelet. WM.
-- Ibeji with Beaded Cloth. WM.
-- Ibeji with Cowrie Shell Vest. WM.
-- Beaded Crown. PG.

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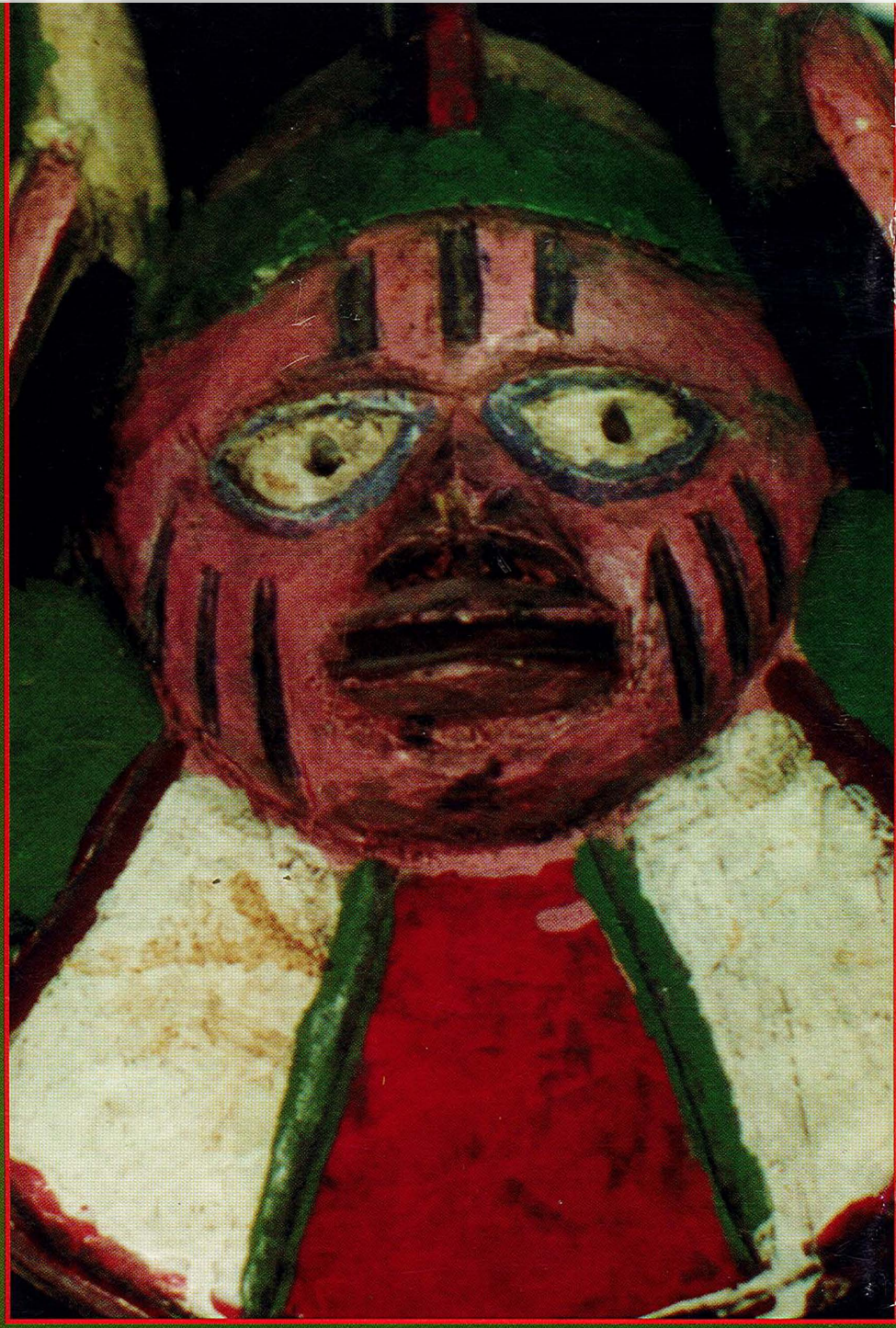

LECTURES

September 13 The Golden Word:Verbal Messages of Akan Gold Work by Martha Ehrlich;
September 19 Yoruba Art Honoring Kings, Women, and Ancestors by Roslyn Walker;
October 6 African Leaders as Art Patrons by Judith Perani.

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OHIO HUMANITIES COUNCIL

The Ohio Arts Council helped fund this program with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans.