

BOCA RATON MUSEUM OF ART

**AFRICAN COLLECTION
GALLERY GUIDE**

Written by Susan Cooksey, Ph.D.
Designed by Austin Modine
Edited by Kelli Bodle
Photographed by Jacek Gancarz

Boca Raton Museum of Art

501 Plaza Real, Boca Raton, FL 33432
561.392.2500 | bocamuseum.org

This gallery guide is sponsored in part by the City of Boca Raton, the Board of County Commissioners, the Tourist Development Council, and the Cultural Council of Palm Beach County; the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.

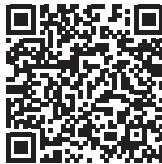


AFRICAN COLLECTION GALLERY GUIDE

Please return this booklet to one of the holders as you leave the gallery.

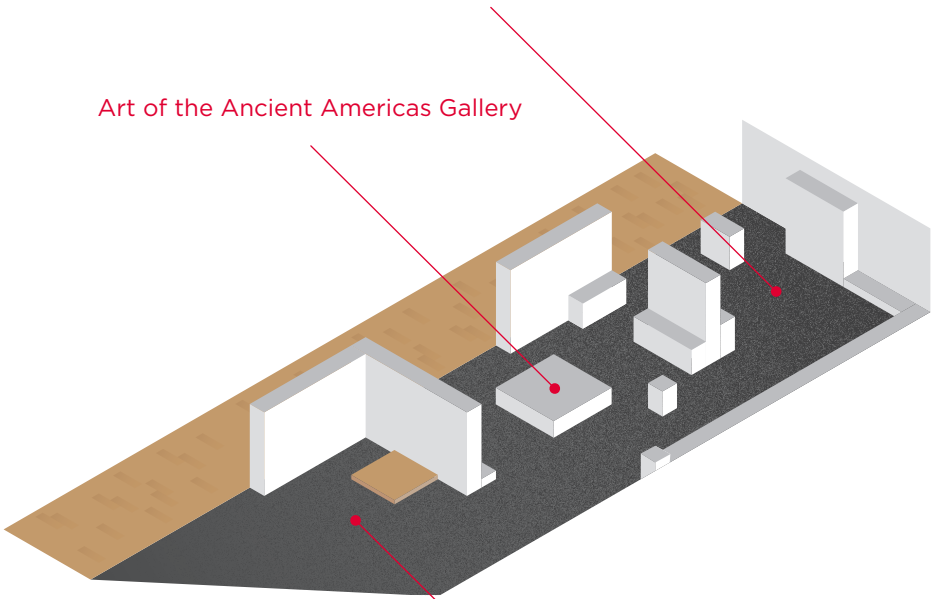
It is available for download from the museum's website at

bocamuseum.org/gallery-guides



African Collection Gallery

Art of the Ancient Americas Gallery



Modern and Contemporary Gallery

INTRODUCTION

This exhibition, drawn from the Boca Raton Museum of Art's African Collection, presents objects created by artists from diverse cultural backgrounds and eras, beginning in the 17th century and extending to the late 20th century. These works, made of metal, wood, beads, or fabric, illuminate the intersection of art and life, and aesthetics and meaning, and focus our attention on art in personal, social, religious, and political spheres. With its emphasis on human experience, the exhibition features a rich variety of images of men and women, representing human beauty, character, vitality, and potential. Lavish personal adornments, including textiles, beadwork, and jewelry, enhance bodily presence, reflect personal aesthetics, and elevate prestige and status. Regalia of chiefs, kings, queens, and society's elite members, fashioned with opulent materials and extraordinary technical skill, address power relationships between rulers and commoners and human and divine forces. In Africa, art is also essential in communication between humans, spirits, and deities, as seen in exquisite objects for healing, divination, and honoring ancestors. Spiritual intervention in human lives is the primary purpose of many masquerades, which are often thought of as the embodiments of spirits. Such spirit-being masks in the exhibition — some frightful, some beautiful — may preside over rites of passage, help sustain the community or honor high-achieving individuals. Others, dazzling secular masks, perform as entertainers.

Works in this exhibition represent art forms with deep historical roots. Yet, many have taken on new forms and meanings as they continue to inspire, empower and inform lives on the African continent and beyond.



1. Skirt, Kuba artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, n.d., fabric and raffia, Acquired 2000; Museum Purchase

2. Mask (*Deangle*), N'gere artist, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, n.d., mixed media. Acquired 2017; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas R. Feuring

The N'Gere believe that masks are manifestations of forest spirits. Many peoples in the region have a version of this mask, called *deangle*, known as a friendly female spirit. Dea means “joking” or “laughing,” gle refers to a spirit masquerade. Depicted as a beautiful woman, she has glistening skin, a high-domed forehead, full lips, and chiseled teeth represented by white metal insets. Her distinctive conical headdress is embellished with red cloth, cowrie shells, glass beads, seed pods, and feline fur, which symbolize wealth and spiritual power. Typically, *deangle's* costume is a long grass skirt under a flowing tunic of locally woven indigo-dyed cloth that conceals the entire body. While the mask embodies a female being, the masker, who is always a man, must hide his identity as a male and as a human, particularly from women and the uninitiated. Narrow eye slits obscure the masker's eyes to ensure that any women he encounters will not recognize him.



3. Dance Rattle, Kuba artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, 20th century, bent reed, split reed, leather, metal, and red pigment. Acquired 2008; Museum Purchase

4. Ceremonial Hobbyhorse Head, Bamana artist, Koulikoro region, Mali, Late 19th to 20th century, wood. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

5. Lion with Prey, Fon artist, Republic of Benin, 20th century, copper alloy. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mrs. Edna Beron

6. Prestige hat (*mpu*), Kongo artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, 20th century, raffia palm fiber. Acquired 2005; Museum Purchase

7. Woman's Anklet (*tolo Kajin*), Mali, Burkina Faso, or Côte d'Ivoire artist, 20th century, copper alloy. Acquired 1994; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Ludwig

Affluent women and girls wear elegant boat-shaped anklets accentuated with geometric motifs in central Côte d'Ivoire and southern Burkina Faso as markers of status and prestige. Brass is a favored metal for personal adornment as it conveys beauty and importance. In addition to its aesthetic properties, brass is thought to please spirit beings, and sculptures and amulets in bracelets, rings, and other body adornments are also made for people seeking spiritual assistance. For funeral ceremonies, women wear the gleaming anklets called *tolo Kajin*, with their finest garments, to show respect to the deceased's spirit.

8. Men's Society Face Mask (*kpelie-yehe*), Senufo artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century, wood. Acquired 2002; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Irwin A. Weiser



9. Beaked Face Mask (*gegong*), Dan or Mano artist, Liberia, 20th century, wood, colobus monkey fur, white metal with patina. Acquired 1989; Gift of Ms. Merrily C. Baird

10. Divination Figure (*pom'wama* or *Pom'Kandya*), Kissi artist, Guinea, Liberia, or Sierra Leone, 20th century, wood, glass beads, copper alloy, feline teeth, palm oil, unidentified substances. Acquired 1989; Gift of Ronald and Benita Baird Barab

11. Three Miniature Masks (*ma go*), Dan artist, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century, wood, patina, white metal, and iron. Acquired 2017; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas R. Feurring

12. Face Mask (*gunye ge*), Dan artist, Liberia/Ivory Coast, 20th century, wood, white metal, natural fibers, and pigment. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

The *gunye ge* mask is unlike most Dan masks in that it is not a manifestation of a forest spirit, but of a benevolent domestic spirit who resides in the home. *Gunye ge* masks are also unique because a family and not a men's organization has authority over them. The mask's large round eye holes are essential to its role in racing. Each week in the dry season boys and men compete in separate footraces around the village. The winner of the race wears the *gunye ge* mask in the next week's competition. The mask is both a handicap and an advantage, because it limits visibility on the treacherous course, and conversely it intimidates competitors. This mask has added enhancements of aluminum accentuating his eyes, and a short fiber beard. A smear of red on the lips of the masker may be from a kola nut, which signals spectators to share this mild stimulant with him.



13. Pair of Twin Figures (*ere ibeji*), Yoruba artist, Nigeria, Late 19th- early 20th century, wood, cowrie shells, glass beads, coconut shell beads, camwood, and patina. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

Small sculpted male and female figures, called *ere ibeji* or “images of twins,” express Yoruba peoples’ powerful reverence for twins. The Yoruba, who have an exceptionally high rate of twin births, believe that twins have a strong connection to the spirit world that empowers them to benefit or harm their families, thus they are treated with special care. Twins are closely linked to one another, and a deceased twin will lure its other twin to join it in the spirit world. Their parents, fearful of losing the other twin, can commission an artist who specializes in creating images of the twins to carve a figure of the deceased twin to appease it.

14. Twin Figure (*ere ibeji*), Yoruba artist, Nigeria, Late 19th- early 20th century, wood, glass beads, and patina. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

15. Twin Figure (*ere ibeji*), Yoruba artist, Nigeria, n.d., wood, pigment, and beads. Acquired 2002; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Irwin Weiser

16. Bowl for Ifa Divination (*agere Ifá*), Yoruba artist, Nigeria, 20th century, wood and pigment. Acquired 2002; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Irwin Weiser

17. Crest mask (*ungulali*), Idoma artist, Nigeria, First half 20th century, wood and pigment. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

18. Face Mask (*Elu*), Ogoni artist, Nigeria, 20th century, wood, pigment, and metal. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim



19. Fertility Figure (*akua'ba*), Fante artist, Ghana, 20th century, wood, glass beads, fiber, and patina. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

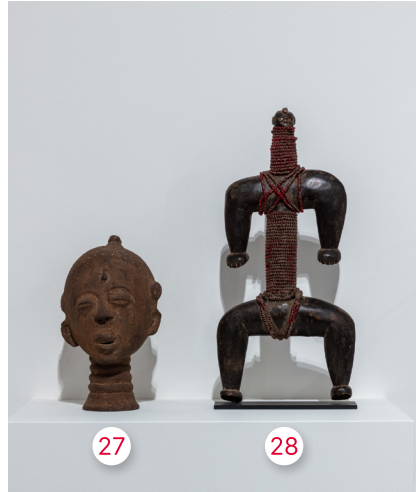
20. Fertility Figure (*akua'ba*), Abron artist, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century, wood and patina. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

21. Fertility Figure (*akua'ba*), Fante artist, Ghana, 20th century, wood, glass beads, and patina. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

22. Fertility Figure (*akua'ba*), Asante artist, Ghana, 20th century, wood, pigment, and glass bead seeds. Acquired 2002; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Irwin A. Weiser

Beautifully carved male and female figures are created by Akan artists of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire to assist women with conceiving and bearing healthy children. According to Akan legend, the first of these figures were carved when a woman named Akua, who was unable to conceive, consulted a healer who told her to have an artist cut a figure of wood representing a beautiful, healthy child. He also instructed her to care for the figure as if it were a living child by bathing, adorning, and carrying it with her. Following his instruction, Akua eventually bore a beautiful child. Thus the tradition began of carving the figures, who are called *Akua'ba* or "Akua's child."

Stylistic traits of *akua'ba* vary regionally, as seen in the examples of Ashanti, Fante, and Abron versions. Nevertheless, there are some overarching similarities in their aesthetics, reflected in their images of an ideally beautiful and healthy Akan person: the emphasis on the head, with its high forehead; arched eyebrows; symmetrical features; and fleshy neck rings.



23. Male Spirit Spouse Figure (*blolo bian*), Baule artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century, wood, patina, and glass beads. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

24. Funerary Bed, Senufo artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century, wood and patina. Acquired 1994; Museum Purchase with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Steinman

25. Face Mask with Ram's Horns, Soma/Landa artist, Liberia (Guinea), n.d., wood. Acquired 2017; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas R. Feuring

26. Men's Society Mask (*angbai*), Loma (Toma) artist, Liberia (Guinea), 20th century, wood, cowrie shells, pigment, leather, iron, animal hair, duiker horns, bird talon, medicine bundles with a seed pod, cotton fiber, animal hair, and unidentified substances. Acquired 1993; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Steinman

27. Commemorative Portrait Head, Akan artist, Ghana, 17th-19th century, terracotta. Acquired 2007; Gift of Dorothy A. Sturman in memory of George L. Sturman

28. Doll, Namji artist, Cameroon, n.d., wood and beads. Acquired 1993; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Steinman



29. State Stool, Akan artist, Ghana, 20th century, wood and copper alloy. Acquired 2007; Gift of Dorothy A. Sturman in memory of George L. Sturman

Elaborately carved stools for Akan chiefs and queen mothers (wives of chiefs) are iconic emblems of authority. The most prestigious stools feature a bowed seat, supported by a central column flanked by curved crenelated struts, and are adorned with metal sheeting. This is a prestigious state stool called *kotoko*, or “porcupine,” a primary symbol of the kingdom. It references the proverb “If you kill a thousand, a thousand will arise,” analogizing the animal’s lethal quills cast at its enemies and then regenerated to the chief’s steadfast political and military power. The stool visually references the legitimacy of power and the contestation of power. In the center of the seat, a metal disk with a *repoussé* (hammered relief) design represents a beautiful flower that evokes envy. The motif serves as a warning for those who seek to overthrow the legitimate leader.

Beyond its material function, the stool is a transcendent symbol of the spiritual power of the chief and the state he represents. Throughout his reign, a chief’s stool is profoundly linked to his personhood and his spiritual essence, and only he is allowed to sit on it. While the stool is a functional seat, chiefs rarely sit on them after their investiture rituals are completed, and queen mothers sit on them only during ceremonies.



30. Antelope Crest Mask (*ciwara kun*), Bamana artist, Mali, 20th century, wood, brass, cotton thread, and feather. Acquired 1993; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Steinman



31. Memorial Staff (*asen*), Fon artist, Republic of Benin, n.d., brass and iron. Acquired 2015; Gift of Dr. Jerome and Rhoda E. Dersh

Fon families commemorate their deceased family members with staffs called *asen*. These commemorative staffs are installed in the family's memorial shrine house with other devotional objects made over generations. Most importantly, *asen* express the family's desire to maintain good relations with the dead, who are thought to live on a parallel plane.

This staff depicts a feast with the participants seated around a large calabash bowl filled with food. The focus is on the deceased, the larger man who is eating. Wearing a prestigious necklace and having an attendant shade him under an umbrella, he can be identified as a person of wealth and status. The donor, accompanied by his wife, raises the bowl's lid. The other figures could be ancestors, who are treated with equal respect. Families chose the artists known to make the most aesthetically pleasing *asen*. The most prestigious artists were the Hontondji family of Abomey, who originally made *asen* for the Fon royal court. Uniquely shaped pendants attached to the rim of the staffs are signatures of the artist. Heart-shaped pendants on this elaborate staff signify that a member of the Lamaducelo lineage of the Hontondji family created it.



32. Mask for Women's Society (*ndoli joweï*), Mende artist, Sierra Leone, Liberia, first quarter of 20th century, wood, white metal, and patina. Acquired 2015; Gift of Dr. Jerome and Rhoda E. Dersh

Masquerades of the women's Sande society of the Mende and their neighbors in Sierra Leone and Liberia are one of the few women's masquerades in Africa exclusively controlled and worn by women. Sande represents women's interests and powers in social, political, and religious contexts. The members entitled to wear masks personify Sande's potent medicine and embody its spirit. The members allowed to wear masks personify Sande's powerful medicine and embody its spirit. Working in tandem with its leaders, who are called *soweï*, the masks guide women in the ways of Sande, beginning with the initiation rites of young women. The masker also has the title *soweï*, but when it comes out to dance, it is called *ndoli joweï*. The dancer wears a carved wooden helmet mask, a raffia costume covering the body, and black cloth coverings for the hands and feet. The mask represents Sande's image of female perfection and power. Women's physical beauty, wisdom, and fecundity are represented in the canonical features of the carved mask, with its gleaming black surface, high forehead, downcast eyes, small, symmetrical nose, mouth and chin, and fat rings on the neck. The top of the mask incorporates elements of elaborate coiffures, protective medicine horns and other amulets, and motifs symbolizing the powers and precepts of Sande.

This mask has relatively naturalistic and sensitively modeled features with particular attention to the eyes. The braided hairstyle, inlaid with a silver diadem, is overlaid with a snake and four reptiles or amphibians whose tails extend toward a topknot. Snakes are a common motif that is generally interpreted as spirit mediators and signs of regeneration, and for Mende women, they are associated with conception.

33. Helmet Mask for Women's Society (*malejowej*), Attributed to the workshop of Manowulo; Yabaima, Jaiama-Bongor, Bo, Sierra Leone, about 1950, wood with the remains of white metal decorations and patina. Acquired 2016; Gift of Jerome and Rhoda E. Dersh

Mende artists and groups of artists in workshops were recognized in their communities as skilled and innovative Sande mask carvers. The names of artists were rarely recorded when their works were collected or sold to outsiders, but their styles and motifs can identify them. The style of this mask compares to a published work attributed to the artist Manowulo (1935), or it may have been made by one of his many followers (1960s). This artist and his workshop can be identified by the distinctive mask features seen on this mask: a diamond-shaped face with narrow eyes and an elegant long nose, large parallel neck rings, distinctive coiffure with paired large and small horns, vertical rows of circular shapes, and a platform on top, probably meant to support an amulet. The coiffure adornments signify that the soweï mask embodies Sande's power and indicates that when the mask dances, she is as graceful and agile as an antelope. The Mende believe that the mask's most beautiful form is manifested when it dances, and its performance evokes both admiration and jealousy from spectators. Medicines and amulets, represented or secreted inside the mask, protect the dancer from evil spells hurled at her by the envious onlookers. The white metal covering the horns is considered both prestigious and spiritually pure and conveys beauty, wealth, and spiritual protection.



34. Face mask (*ngady a mwash*), Kuba artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, first half of 20th century, wood, pigment, raffia cloth, cowrie shells, glass beads. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

35. Royal mask (*bwoom*), Kuba artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, 20th century, wood, beads, copper, cowrie shells, raffia cloth, cotton cloth, seeds, feathers, and monkey hair. Acquired 1993; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Steinman

36. Ceremonial Bow Stand with Female Figure, Luba artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, 20th century, wood and iron. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Steinman

37. Diviner's bag (*àpo ilékè Ifá*), Yoruba artist, Nigeria, early 20th century, glass beads, cloth, leather, or another substrate. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

38. Diviner's Necklace (*ikolaba ifá or òdìgbà ifá*), Yoruba artist, Nigeria, early 20th century, beads, leather, cloth, and fiber. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

Devotees of Yoruba religion rely on a system of divination called Ifa to seek self-knowledge throughout their lives. Ifa diviners, known as the Babalawo, or "father of ancient wisdom," guide their clients with various implements, some adorned with exquisite beadwork. Beadwork is considered both a prestigious and sacred art form in Yoruba culture. The divination process involves interaction with all cosmic forces, including myriad deities, the orisha. Bead colors are associated with the identity of orisha, characterized by their temperament as cool, hot, or moderate.

Necklaces of diviners, *òdìgbà Ifá* or *ikolaba Ifá*, are made of multiple strands of beads of countless colors, demonstrating their capacity to address the needs of their clients and connections to the world of the orisha. The necklace also protects the diviner and his family from malignant spiritual forces. Beaded cylinders on the necklace encase seeds or wood from a tree sacred to the god of divination, Orunmila, that are meant to deflect death and ensure a long life. The two pouches attached at opposite ends of the necklace contain protective substances. One is worn on the chest and the other on the back of the neck, which are the most spiritually vulnerable parts of the body.

Designs on the pouches and cylinders meld numerological and chromatic symbols to produce cosmic order and resolution through Ifá. Triangles, representing the number three associated with change and uncertainty, and the orisha and otherworldly forces are counterbalanced with the diamond shapes. The number four connotes understanding, discovery, and wisdom through divination.

The cylinders with dynamic zigzag patterns are arrayed in hot colors, red and pink, juxtaposed with cool white and temperate colors such as green and black. Cool colors may be associated with healing deities Obatala and the goddess Osun. The hot hues with Ogun, the god of iron and warfare, and Shango, the god of lightning and thunder. Temperate green, black and blue hues tend to represent the trickster messenger Eshu Elegba, or the god of divination and wisdom, Orunmila.



39. Healer's Staff (*opa orete or opa osanyin*), Yoruba artist, Nigeria, 20th century, iron. Acquired 2000; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Irwin Weiser

40. Crown (*ade*), Yoruba artist, Nigeria, n.d., beads and cloth. Acquired 2007; Gift of June Bakalar

41. Ceremonial Lidded Bowl for Shango, Yoruba artist, Nigeria, 20th century, wood, camwood powder, and washing blue. Acquired 2000; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Irwin Weiser

Shango, the fiery Yoruba god of thunder and lightning, is said to be an apotheosized ruler of the ancient kingdom of Oyo. Such was the power of the deity that he is worshipped throughout the African diaspora, including the Caribbean, South America, and the United States. Shango's volatile temperament is associated with the "hot" color red, and he is symbolized by two triangles representing double ax heads. The symbol was derived from the stone celts that wash ashore after rainstorms, which are said to be remnants of the lightning bolts that the god hurls to the earth. Shrines to Shango feature altars with various offerings, including stone celts and foodstuffs in carved wood or ceramic vessels. This bowl, with relief carvings of a double ax head motif and medicine gourd, is rubbed with the "hot" red pigment, camwood, representing the heat of Shango. In contrast, two relief faces carved near the rim, which could be the messenger god Eshu Elegba, or a Shango worshipper, is rubbed with "cool" blue pigment.



42. Gelede Mask (òrò èfè), Yoruba artist, Nigeria, 20th century, wood and pigment. Acquired 2000; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin J. Curkin



43. Lintel for Chief's House, Pende artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, 20th century, wood and pigment. Acquired in 1993; Gift from Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Steinman

Each Eastern Pende chief must build a temporary ritual structure, called a kibulu, with architectural elements symbolizing his power and responsibility to sustain the community. Paramount chiefs strive to create a distinctive and visually dazzling structure, hiring the most prominent artists to create sculptural adornments on the roof and vestibule. The doorway is adorned with figural relief panels on the posts and lintel. The relief images on this lintel, a triad of trapezoidal faces with extended ears, represent bush buffalos, a symbol of chiefly power. The lintel with the buffalo emblem of chieftaincy, and other carved figures with watchful eyes surrounding the kibulu, serve as sentinels who protect the chief. At the same time, they surveil the leader, reminding him to use his authority for the well-being of his constituents and not for his political gain.

44. Bridal apron (*iphotho*), Ndebele artist, South Africa, mid-20th century, leather, glass seed beads, brass beads, and animal hair. Acquired 1994; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Ludwig

Throughout their lives, Ndebele women of South Africa wore garments and adornments that marked specific stages of their lives. Beadwork on garments, such as apron-like panels called *iphotho*, demonstrated the skill, creativity, and aesthetics of the woman who made it. A young girl, initiated girl, bride, or mother wore beaded aprons appropriate to her status. One type of apron worn by brides after entering the home of their husband's family is a beaded rectangular panel of goatskin or fabric, with two lower flaps on the bottom, flanking a row of fine beaded leather strips. The beadwork colors and patterns have changed over time according to the availability of materials, cultural influences, and personal preferences. In the mid-20th century, when this apron was made, Ndebele bead workers used white beads to cover most garments' surfaces and dark-colored beads to create dramatically contrasted abstract motifs. Some aprons were adorned with rows of brass beads, or *iinkozo*, which conveyed the prestige and wealth of the bride. The flaps are interpreted as a wife and husband, with the intervening beaded strands representing the numerous children they hope to have. White beaded cylinders embellish the strands on this apron.

45. Young Woman's Belt (*isigege*), Zulu artist, South Africa, late 19th to early 20th century, glass seed beads, cloth, and natural fibers. Acquired 2005; Museum Purchase

46. Headdress with Antelope Crest (*zazaigo*), Mossi Nakomsé artist, Burkina Faso, mid-20th century, wood, indigenous pigment, and fiber. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

47. Chief's Scepter, Undetermined artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, n.d., wood and copper alloy. Acquired 1992; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hayim

48. Female mask (*Gu*), Guro artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century, wood and pigment. Acquired 1993; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Steinman