Akua'ba
Asante, Ghana

Wood, 10 3/4"
Lakeview Museum of Arts and Sciences.
Peoria, Illinois

The Asante of Ghana produce sculptured forms in diverse media including terracotta, gold, brass and wood. One of the most popular productions is the stylized human form which embodies the Asante ideal of beauty, the Akua'ba doll. Displaying the enlarged disc-shaped head, elongated bulbous (fat-ringed) neck and simplified columnar body structure, Akua'ba stands posed with facial features delicately rendered in bas relief. Prominent forehead and neck represent desirable life qualities of beauty and health.

Functionally, the Akua'ba doll is said to be carried by young girls tucked in waistcloths as Asante women traditionally carry children (Fagg and Plass, 1964:13). It is also carried by expectant mothers who symbolically gaze upon it to encourage the birth of a beautiful and healthy child. (Willett, 1971:112).
Bundu (Soweí)
Mende, Sierra Leone

Wood, 15”
Lakeview Museum of Arts and Sciences
Peoria, Illinois

Although many masks of varying roles throughout Africa convey standardized symbols of feminine beauty, they are worn by and associated with male societies. An exception in both cases is the Bundu or Soweí mask of the Mende who live in Sierra Leone and adjacent parts of Liberia.

The Bundu mask is worn by women of the Sande society, one of the oldest and strongest West African female societies which has the responsibility of educating young girls in adult roles. Bundu expresses religious and social values (Richards, 1974:48). One of such expressions is the symbolic synthesis of order and beauty, characterized by the intricately carved elaborate hairstyle, high domed forehead, fat-ringed neck which is also associated with health and beauty, and smooth dark monochromatic polished surface.
Female Figure (Puppet)  
*Ibibio, Nigeria*

Wood, 33"  
The University Museums  
Normal, Illinois

Throughout Africa ritual and secular drama in honor of deities, heroes, etc. express social and cultural values of the people. Among the Ibibio, the 'arena theatre' which consists of professional actors, plots with memorized dialogues, rehearsals, etc. provides an added dramatic dimension (Messenger, 1971:208). Performances are conducted by members of the *Ekon* society and its companion association *Ijion. Ekon*, the major of the two, is sacred and maintains the responsibility of social control and public amusement which affects the entire community. Masks and figures including puppets are used by both societies to conduct plays which satirically dramatize ethnic standards (Messenger, 1971:209).

The puppet shown reflects beauty and innocence through portrayal of an adolescent girl who has just emerged from *duk mboho* (fattening house). The girl symbolized has obtained the title *eyen mbohi*, a status which also conveys having undergone clitoridectomy. Heftiness is equivalent to health, *Nko* (body scarification) on the figure captures the notion of "blameless maidenhood" (Jeffries, 1956:16). Additional desirable traits are rendered through elongated neck and elaborate hairstyle.
Doll
*Turkana, Kenya*

Wood, leather, beads, 13”
The University Museums
Normal, Illinois

East Africa is most known in artistic circles for its contribution of beaded ornamentation, leatherworks, metal and other forms of body adornments. Holy's map of ethnic groups producing art in East Africa (Holy, 1967:65) indicates that there are very few groups in that area of the continent who have not produced art. Yet scholarly research in the plastic arts is still practically nonexistent.

The figure shown portrays an image of a young Turkana female adorned with body ornamentation. She wears elaborate multi-colored beaded necklaces and a beaded leather apron. Her appearance of simplified angularity bears a roughly finished monochromatic surface. Dolls of this type function as toys and as fertility symbols for young girls of the society (Walker, 1981).
Nimba
Baga, Guinea

Wood, brass 48 1/2"
The University Museums
Normal, Illinois

This massive bust symbolizes Nimba, the goddess of fertility for the Baga in the Republic of Guinea. It is carried on the head of the masquerader during ceremonies connected with the Simo society. Particularly concerned with increase, Nimba brings fertility to women, rice fields and palm groves while also providing protection for pregnant women (Leuzinger, 1972:84).

Raffia drapes the shoulders of Nimba within its ceremonial context and completely covers the four-foot body structure while exposing the large cantilevered head and angular breasts. Incised designs and brass tacks adorn the smooth monochromatic surface and accentuate highly stylized human and birdlike characteristics.
Chi Wara
Bambara/Bamana, Mali

Wood, 30”
Lakeview Museum of Arts and Sciences
Peoria, Illinois

Chi Wara or Tji Wara has its origins among the Bambara of Mali and symbolizes the antelope which according to Bambara mythology taught the practice of cultivation to mankind.

Always appearing in pairs, male and female, each Chi Wara form is attached to a wickerwork cap and costume which completely covers the masquerader. The pair dances rhythmically in fecundity ceremonies which occur before the rainy season and during the dry season when new fields are cleared (Goldwater, 1960:15). Such ceremonies are associated with the Fian kuru society, an age grade of men who are responsible for agricultural production within the community.

The delicately rendered female shown is of the vertical style. She is characterized by her elongated simplification and surmounted child as opposed to her male counterpart which displays an elaborate openwork mane.
Shango Shrine Figure
Yoruba, Nigeria

Wood, cowries, 12 3/16"
The University Museums
Normal, Illinois

Within the vast pantheon of deities of the Yoruba there exists a legendary monarch, Shango, who, according to Yoruba narrations was their fourth king. "He was of very wild disposition, fiery temper, and skillful in sleight of hand tricks. He had a habit of emitting fire and smoke out of his mouth . . ." (Johnson in Thompson, 1971: Ch 12/1). According to legend, his power and danger drove him into exile and suicide whereupon his veneration began and included his recognition as the god of thunder.

Devotees of Shango belong to the Shango cult which performs rituals incorporating a range of natural and man-made forms. Shown is a female devotee of Shango in the kneeling position of worship holding oshe shango or double blade axes which symbolize the thunderbolt. This figure is a shrine piece adorned with cowries signifying the status of the devotee. Conveying messages of praise and power it displays artistic conventions of the Yoruba, bearing characteristics of almond shaped eyes, flared nostrils, protruding lips and overall stylized naturalism.
Ceremonial Mask
Dan, Liberia

Wood, 9"
The University Museums
Normal, Illinois

Some of the most beautiful masks of Africa are created by the Dan of the northwestern (Ivory Coast (Yacuba) and neighboring areas of Liberia (Gio). All are affiliated with the powerful Poro society and are ceremoniously worn to maintain social order. Thompson points out that "the Dan seek social control through artistic and philosophic means, through a cult of the masks" (Thompson, 1974:159).

Femininity is often associated with slit eyes and smooth facial rendering whereas masculine masks generally have a more angular appearance, usually a beard, and slit or rounded eyes.

Himmelheber establishes three categories of Dan masks which he identifies by headdress:
"(1) masks crowned with large plumes; these are frightening or imposing masks of social authority charged with peacekeeping duties and fighting fires; (2) masks surmounted by a conical headdress; these are 'beautiful masks,' connected with circumcision, and the teaching of initiates, with their beauty rationalized: 'without the help of women men would not succeed,' . . . (3) masks with cotton wigs, generally correlate with entertainment and fault-finding" (Himmelheber in Thompson, 1974:160).

It is difficult to ascribe the particular role of the Gio mask shown without its headdress and costume. However it appears most characteristic of Himmelheber's second category which also notes the functional changeability of masks: 'Manner of representation is, however, no absolute clue to function. Masks can change function when different magic substances are applied' (Himmelheber in Thompson, 1974:159).

Feminine beauty of the Dan is portrayed in the naturalistic oval shape of the face, narrow feminine-type eyes and expressive lips. One field informant noted, "Whenever you see a mask with slitted eyes, you think of a beautiful woman" (Tabman in Thompson, 1974:159).
Gelede Mask
Yoruba, Nigeria

Wood 17 1/2"
Milwaukee Public Museum
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Witchcraft historically has been/is a universal human concern. The Yoruba of southwest Nigeria, has among its many cults one which specifically honors the witches of their ethnic group. Known as Gelede, this association consists of elderly women and men, the former being senior members. Lethal powers "... are associated with old women. Hence the senior members of Gelede are old women, commanding the secrets of the 'mothers' of the night for the benefit of society" (Thompson, 1971:Ch 4/2).

Gelede functions also to honor Yemoja (goddess of river and sea) and Olokun (god of the sea), both of whom are associated with witchcraft. Thompson's research reveals other functions of Gelede which include the following: honoring of other associated gods of witchcraft and "... devotees of the hot gods as messengers of witches, i.e., followers of thunder, iron, smallpox, and mischief, and Orisha Oko; nocturnal criticism and prophecy; funeral entertainment; commemoration; aesthetic entertainment and creativity" (Thompson, 1971:Ch 14/1).

Masks associated with Gelede are worn by men of the Gelede society and portray images of both sexes. They may also incorporate other motifs which include people, animals and objects that symbolize traditional ideology and social change. The one shown combines feminine beauty and calm (as do all Gelede masks) with the bird motif, symbolizing the relationship between birds and Yemoja who is leader of the birds (Thompson, 1971:Ch 14/3). Ethnic markings, domed forehead, and elaborate headdress or hairstyle are standard characteristics. Surface coloration may be monochromatic or polychromatic.
Agbogho Mmwo
Igbo, Nigeria

Wood. 17 1/2".
The Ruttenberg Family Foundation
Chicago, Illinois

Agbogho Mmwo masks are associated with the male Mmwo or Maw society of the Igbo in Nigeria and appear at funerary ceremonies. Paulme indicates that they also appear during the rituals related to initiation and the planting of yams (Paulme, 1962:100).

Agbogho Mmwo are worn with elaborate costumes and by middle grade members of the society who perform with movements suggesting activities of women (Willett, 1971:94). Inspiring awe, humor and fear, these masqueraders appear as maidens or adolescents and portray feminine beauty as they "... impersonate ancestral spirits" (Bascom, 1973:64).

Spirituality is symbolized by the calm white facial qualities while female qualities are emphasized by the elaborate hairstyle adorned with mirrors and other decoration.
**Mbulu-Ngulu**

*Bakota or Kuta, Gabon*

Wood, brass, 18”
Elvehjem Museum of Art
Madison, Wisconsin

Mixed media sculpture of wood covered by hammered brass and/or copper add to the dimension of African art through its uniqueness in both form and function. A product of the Bakota or Kuta of Gabon, its stylistic uniqueness is characterized by geometric simplification of the human form. Face and hairstyle/headdress are represented respectively by ovoid and crescent-shaped treatment. Columnar neck and lozenge-shaped opening complete the figure while embossed designs enhance the rhythmic symmetry of its serene appearance.

The *mbulu-ngulu* is often referred to as a guardian figure. Placed on baskets in family shrines which contain ancestral bones, its presence honors and protects the remains of the deceased. Characteristics pertaining to head formation have often been theorized as distinguishing sex of these figures: concave face representing female and bulging forehead representing male. It has also been noted that such ideas are not substantiated by the Kuta (Anderson in Paulme, 1962:117). Elaborate hairstyles appear in figures with either head formation and do reflect hairstyles of Kuta women (hairstyles similar to Kuta are found among the Mpongwe and other neighboring ethnic groups and are manifested in respective art forms).

It is interesting to note that whether the deceased is male or female the protective *mbulu-ngulu* may display the referred-to female element.
Seated Female Figure

Baule, Ivory Coast

Wood Figure, 16 3/4"

The University Museums
Normal, Illinois

Seated images in African sculpture are associated with privilege and status. Among the matrilineal Akan, standing and seated female and male forms convey power, importance, calm and beauty. Figures of the Baule in the Ivory Coast similar to the seated female shown have been ascribed diverse functions by authorities. According to Wingert, they "are made to contain spirits of the dead, as representatives of gods, and as art objects esteemed for their aesthetic quality alone" (Wingert, 1950:24). Bodgrogı classifies Baule figured sculpture as either toys or representations of ancestors (Bodgrogı, 1968:43).

Thompson notes that the seated individual in traditional Akan sculpture "suggests the power of the throne to absolve disorder" (Thompson, 1974:68). Ancestors, in indigenous African beliefs, command the power to resolve disorder and throughout Africa are symbolically represented to function in related ceremonial rites. Projecting ancestral qualities, the seated female figure portrays strength, dignity and feminine grace. Her naturalistic appearance rests symmetrically composed; manifesting African proportions, scarification, elaborate hairstyle and ornamentation. Historic affiliation with the Asante is evidenced in the Asante stool upon which she is seated. (It might be noted that the Baule settled in their current location during the mid-eighteenth century when they left the Asante under the leadership of Queen Aura Pokou).

William Fagg often mentions a French influence upon Baule production making specific reference to forms produced for trade during the twentieth century (Fagg, 1965:16). This work certainly does not have the "sweetness" and "banality" to which he refers, but does possess a universal aesthetic sense of beauty.