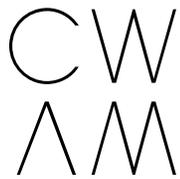


LEADERSHIP ARTS IN AFRICA



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THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER ART MUSEUM

April 25 – May 14, 2017

From divine kingship to initiation societies, many traditional forms of African arts illustrate and support notions of leadership. Masks allow the initiated to connect to potent spiritual forces while conveying the secrets of an exclusive society to neophytes. Regalia highlights the king's liminal status and connectedness to the gods. Ritual paraphernalia enables religious practitioners to access otherworldly realms.

Leadership Arts in Africa considers the complex interactions between visual imagery and the power systems that promulgate leadership in many African societies. Curated by College of Wooster students enrolled in Assistant Professor of Art History Kara Morrow's African Art class, this show features over thirty objects selected from the CWAM's Permanent Collection. Various conceptual categories—divine kingship, local chieftaincy, religious practitioners, and graded societies—comprise the exhibition and challenge our understandings of art's capacity to inform power structures in varied communities.

Kara Morrow
Assistant Professor of Art History
The College of Wooster

Student Curators

Jarrett Art '19
Mackenzie Clark '19
Michael Herman '17
Claire Ilersich '17
Kate Longo '18
Margaret O'Mara '20
Amrin Remtulla '19
Donyea Ruffin '20
Natalie Souleyrette '19
Harrison Uhall '17
Emily Walker '17
Alex Wendt '17
Grace Williams '18



Student curators writing and editing extended object labels.

Burton D. Morgan Gallery
The College of Wooster Art Museum



Installation views.

Burton D.
Morgan Gallery
The College of
Wooster Art
Museum





Installation views.

Burton D. Morgan Gallery
The College of Wooster Art Museum

Dogon peoples, Mali

Post, 20th century

Wood

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2009.30

Gift of Dr. David C. and Karina Rilling



Traditionally constructed on cliff faces, the architecture of Dogon villages reflects their environmental constraints. This post features rhythmic sculptural carving that serves as a ladder to the structure's roof, combining aesthetic values with functionality.

This post is similar to those found in the *Togu Na*, a male meeting house. These open-sided structures have a thick, low roof which creates a shaded area that forces men to sit closely together, encouraging peace during tense discussions.

Rows of forked, decorated columns support the roof of these structures and can be painted, carved, or adorned with various materials. Women are not permitted in the *Togu Na*; however, posts commonly feature designs representative of women's bodies, emphasizing the importance of fecundity and female ancestors within the community. Such female representations in a male-dominated space express the ideal of Dogon leadership through constant visual reminders of the power balance between men and women.

Mackenzie Clark '19
English and Art History
Double Major



Bamana peoples, Mali

Textile (bogolan), 20th century

Cloth, natural pigments

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2013.83



Bogolan, also called *bogolanfini* or mud cloth, is a cotton textile dyed with layers of mud and natural pigments. Geometric designs hold significant messages that are sometimes associated with female power, responsibilities, and age-grade rituals.

In Bamana tradition, blood contains a powerful life force called *nyama*. Traditionally, when girls begin their initiation into womanhood, they undergo female circumcision, and dangerous *nyama* is released. During the healing process, they wear special *bogolan* to contain the dangerous forces while their sponsors, typically postmenopausal women, teach the initiates about the significance of the transition into womanhood.

After initiation, the *bogolan* are presented to the sponsors as gifts. This tradition emphasizes the status of the initiated women as leaders, teachers, and healers responsible for educating the next generation.

Today, *bogolan* is commonly produced for tourist consumption and the patterns can be found in fashion, fine art, and commercial products.



Mackenzie Clark '19
English and Art History
Double Major

Benin peoples, Nigeria

Pair of Royal Retainers, c. 17th century

Brass or copper alloy

The College of Wooster Art Museum 1980.125

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953



These figures likely adorned one of the ancestral altars of the *oba* (king) of Benin. The rings and jewelry adorning their bodies, along with the elaborate coral-beaded shirts covering their torsos signal the figures' courtly duties. This is reinforced through their use of side-blown ivory trumpets or *akohen* played by the *oba*'s retainers during rituals.

The altars that supported such objects both honored the worldly achievements of the *oba*'s paternal ancestors and allowed the current *oba* to communicate with the ancestral spirits whose power granted him sovereignty and assured the well-being of the entire kingdom. Thus, royal ancestor altars and the objects placed on them are physical representations of Benin beliefs surrounding the reciprocal relationship between the *oba*, his subjects, and the ancestors.



Harrison Uhall '17

Religious Studies Major

Benin peoples, Nigeria

Head, 20th century

Brass or copper alloy

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2007.131

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953,
and Renee-Paule Moyencourt



Similar to the horn blowers, this sculpture of a royal head probably once decorated a Benin *oba's*, king's, shrine in the royal palace of Benin City. Such altars focused on the veneration of the heads of past *obas*. Sculpted bronze or brass heads, replete with coral beaded crowns, graced these altars, referencing the ancient, divine lineage of current leaders.

Kara Morrow

Assistant Professor of Art History



Bamun/Bamileke peoples, Cameroon

Prestige pipe, 20th century

Ceramic, wood

The College of Wooster Art Museum 1992.2

Gift of Mikell Kloeters



Cowrie shells, spotted leopards, and prestige pipes symbolize the power of the *fon*—the religious and political leader of the Bamun peoples—whose society first developed in the late sixteenth-seventeenth centuries.

The *fon* had many responsibilities, including achieving communal equilibrium, maintaining societal well-being, and assuring dynastic continuity.

Royal prestige pipes range from simple to elaborate depending on the gender and rank of the owner. Kings smoked during public appearances, allowing for reflection during court assemblies. Since pipes were part of the *fon*'s regalia, they were displayed as indicators of status on ceremonial occasions.

This pipe bowl is made of terracotta, and depicts a human sitting on a stool. The figure wears a prestige cap probably decorated with cowrie shells. The triangular marks on its shirt may represent leopard markings.

Alex Wendt '17
Art History and English
Double Major



Bamileke peoples, Cameroon

Mask (*nkang*), 20th century

Wood

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2007.98

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953,
and Renee-Paule Moyencourt



The Bamileke peoples have a rich history of creating wooden masks, which include animal heads and anthropomorphic representations associated with the *nkang* or king. During Bamileke masquerades, the *nkang* mask always enters first, as it is the most important. The mask with its commanding geometric features—wide ovoid eyes, prominent arched nose, and open mouth—sits on the top of the masquerader's head. A cloth with cut eye openings hides the performer's face.

On this example, four leopards surmount the head of the *nkang*. Leopards symbolize the power of the ruler through their strength and speed. The presence of the leopards on the mask makes it clear to anyone in Bamileke society that the figure represents a king.

Kate Longo '18
Biochemistry and
Molecular Biology Major

Bamileke peoples, Cameroon

Elephant mask, 20th century

Wood, paint

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2007.96

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953,
and Renee-Paule Moyencourt



Bamileke societies believe elephants possess similar characteristics to their king. These traits include power and majesty, so they refer to their king as “elephant” or “elephant hunter.” When a king dies, a several-week ceremony begins that culminates in a masquerade of the king’s masks.

The masks enter the ceremony in order of importance. The *nkang* (king) mask arrives first but is closely followed by the elephant mask because of its close association with the king. The elephant mask is elongated and worn on top of the masquerader’s head. The trunk, tusks, and ears extend far beyond the dancer’s body, enabling the masquerader to command viewer attention. During the ceremony, masqueraders dance in a sedate and respectable manner, reflecting the mask’s high status and association with the king.

Kate Longo ‘18
Biochemistry and
Molecular Biology Major



Bamun/Bamileke peoples, Cameroon

Stool, 20th century

Wood

The College of Wooster Art Museum 1992.1

Gift of Mikell Kloeters



Bamun/Bamileke peoples, Cameroon

Prestige pipe, 20th century

Ceramic

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2009.28

Gift of Dr. David C and Karina Rilling

Nshare Yen, the founder of the Bamun kingdom, sat on a simple wooden stool, which echoes the stool's significance in this culture. Bamun and Bamileke sculptors carve such objects where the tree is felled, and deliver the carved stool to the palace after completion. Ritual experts consecrate royal stools, differentiating them from their domestic counterparts.

This stool was most likely utilitarian and domestic. Spider motifs comprise the middle section, and are symbolic of an intimate relationship with the ancestors. The Bamileke believe that after death, the deceased enter the world below the ground that resembles a mirror image of the world left behind. Ground-dwelling spiders represent communication with the ancestors.

The prestige pipe in front of the stool is the specialty of Bamun artists. They believe that during ritual occasions, smoking creates a connection to the ancestors. Typically, human and animal forms decorate the pipe bowl. The spider represented on this one symbolizes the leadership of the *fon* or king, as well as wisdom and prophecy.

Alex Wendt '17

Art History and English Double Major

Igbo peoples, Nigeria, Cross River Region

Mask, 20th century

Wood, cowrie shells, cloth

The College of Wooster Art Museum 1985. 11

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953



The Igbo or Ibo peoples would call this sculpture a “dark mask.” Dark masks are often carved with grotesque features meant to manifest male spirits and represent water spirits descended from threatening rain clouds. In contrast, the Igbo’s small, light masks are carved with refined delicate features and manifest female spirits.

Male masqueraders perform these ritually powerful masks at the end of the seasons. The masqueraders and their entourages carry clubs and sing mournful songs about war and conquest. The cowrie shells seen here have multiple meanings that vary from currency to medicinal substances. Talismanic charms or protective medicines appear in the form of small packets suggesting the role of this mask as a powerful but beneficial force in the community.

Masks play a major role in the Igbo communities. Many masquerades glorify femininity, praising women’s grace and beauty, while others celebrate masculinity, promoting aggression and even ugliness. In other words, masking defines the genders, balancing masculine and feminine roles in the community.



Donyea Ruffin '20

Computer Science and

Business Economics

Double Major

Mende peoples, Sierra Leone/Liberia

Helmet mask (sowei), 20th century

Wood

The College of Wooster Art Museum 1980.121

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953



The *sowesía*, or high-ranking member of the all-female Sande society, performs the *sowei* mask as part of initiation rituals and member funerals. This society is responsible for both transitioning girls into adulthood and maintaining the ritual knowledge of healing and herbal medicines for the Mende communities.

During initiation ceremonies, funerals, weddings, and other Sande celebrations, the *sowesía* performs the dance of the *sowei* mask. This performance channels the energy and power of a Sande water spirit who represents fertility, fecundity, and the ideal of female Mende beauty. The broad, domed forehead and small face of the mask represent various aspects of the feminine role in Mende society, as does the stylized coiffure and the thick rings around the neck.



Margaret O'Mara '20

Art History Major

Mende peoples, Sierra Leone/Liberia

Helmet mask (gbetu), 20th century

Wood

The College of Wooster Art Museum 1985.10

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953



Poro, a men's initiation society, performs this mask in public displays such as funerals, initiation ceremonies, and other special occasions. The helmet mask covers the top of the head, and a traditional raffia costume obscures the rest of the body. An energetic dance activates the mask as it calls on the power of the spirits for fertility, strength, and progress in the community.

The long, ringed neck surmounting the geometric base supports a small head with tiny eyes, ears, and mouth, and an elaborate coiffure. This part of the helmet mask resembles a Sande *sowei* mask. The prominent neck also represents the decidedly masculine power of the mask, which conveys strong sexual symbolism, and reflects the transition undergone during Poro initiation rites when a young Mende boy enters manhood.

Margaret O'Mara '20
Art History Major



Senufo Peoples, Côte d'Ivoire

Helmet mask (kponyungo), 20th century

Wood, pigment

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2007.114

Gift of William C. Mithoefer and

Renee-Paule Moyencourt



The “Funeral Head Mask” is a large zoomorphic, helmet mask worn by the highest member of Poro, a men’s age-grade society. The masquerade performance is an ancestral rite of passage for Poro graduates who have recently died.

Called *kponyungo*, the helmet mask is carved from a solid piece of wood. Hollow inside, it has a long horizontal mouth, referencing a crocodile. Other characteristics include boar-like tusks, antelope horns, a chameleon, and a hornbill bird, all of which appear in many Senufo arts. Each animal represents the power it entails.

The powerful and fierce appearance corresponds with its use and purpose. During performance, masqueraders beat their drums as they walk through the town, finishing at the final resting place of the deceased Poro member. Powerful movements, rhythmic drumming, and ringing bells drive the spirit out of the town into the realm of the dead. This separation prevents the spirit from causing any future chaos.

Jarrett Art ‘19

Biology Major

Senufo peoples, Côte d'Ivoire

Mask (kpelie), 20th century

Wood, pigment

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2007.115

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953,
and Renee-Paule Moyencourt



The *kpelie* mask encompasses the Senufo perception of beauty. While anthropomorphic, its design includes elements of both animals and humans. This mask references the Senufo goddess, *Katyelëëo*. Its smooth, calm, cool appearance balances with animal imagery, each representing its own proverb and iconography. The masquerader places the mask over the face, and dons a black raffia costume typically adorned with cowrie shells. The *kpelie* mask appears at social functions such as funerals, initiations, or harvest rituals.

The details of the mask suggest a connection between masculinity and femininity, made manifest by the horns atop the head of a beautiful female face. These horns—similar to a ram—have sacrificial significance to the Senufo. The mask's imagery demonstrates a connection between the living world and the spirit realm.



Jarrett Art '19

Biology Major

Salampasu peoples, Democratic
Republic of the Congo

Mask (mukinka), 20th century

Wood, copper, fiber

The College of Wooster Art Museum 1976.20

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953



Known as *mukinka*, this mask is carved from a soft wood, tiled with strips of copper, and has dangling raffia braids. Men in *mungongo*, a secret society embedded in the Salampasu community, would have worn this mask. This society focuses on strengthening the community by monitoring outside enemies and internal violence. The mask would have been worn during important ceremonial dances, such as a funeral for a member of *mungongo*.

Copper, a precious and valuable material in this region, suggests notions of strength and leadership. The sharp teeth signify beauty and refinement, not aggression, and the basketry of the coiffeur mirrors common hairstyles associated with beauty and economic status. Worn during celebrations, the mask both hides and highlights the warriors and protectors of the society.

Claire Ilersich '17
Art History and Philosophy
Double Major



Kuba peoples,
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Palm wine cup (mbwoongntey),
20th century



Wood
The College of Wooster Art Museum 2007.120
Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953,
and Renee-Paule Moyencourt

This cup, and ones similar to it, were most likely associated with social status and political power in the Kuba community, which is organized as a centralized merit-based governing system. Also known as a prestige cup, these anthropomorphic and geometrically carved wooden cups display the elegance and prestige of the individual, as well as the kingdom. Some cups hold either palm wine or *tukela* paste (red camwood used as a temporary dye), while others seem to have a primarily decorative purpose.

Deeply carved geometric patterns flow over the human form of this vessel. Some cups found in this region only display the head. Cups that showcase the full body, as well as the stylization of the hair, are indicative of a higher status or position within the Kuba kingdom.



Claire Ilersich '17
Art History and Philosophy
Double Major

Lega peoples, Democratic
Republic of the Congo
Caps (bwami), 20th century

Wood, copper, fiber
The College of Wooster Art Museum 2009.36-38
Gift of Dr. David C. and Karina Rilling



Both male and female leaders in the Bwami society wear these caps for casual occasions. They all include some type of shell to denote the wearer's societal advancement.

Men at the *kindi* level, which is the highest grade, would have worn caps decorated with cowrie shells, a material historically used as currency. Each hat includes sprigs of elephant hair emerging from the top to denote strength. The passing of hats to new initiates, or to members advancing in the society, symbolizes the passing of knowledge.

The Lega community view Bwami members as positive influences and role models. Cap wearers dominate the political, economic, and social factors of the Bwami society. The materials on the caps serve to represent and remind the audience and wearer of the strength and power garnered through initiation and knowledge.



Claire Ilersich '17
Art History and Philosophy
Double Major

Asante peoples, Ghana

Cloth (adinkra) and stamps, 20th century

Cloth, dye, calabash, thread

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2013.81-83



Akan proverb:

***Two headed crocodiles fight over food that goes to a common stomach
because each relishes the food in its throat.***

Asante textiles such as this yellow *adinkra* support distinctive symbols, each of which has a variety of possible meanings based on the viewer's perspective. The symbols printed on this *adinkra* show stamped images of turtles, crossed crocodiles, and hearts. Respectively, these stamps represent adaptability, shared resources, and wisdom. In Asante culture, these symbols reflect various values through the given names of important figures, events, and proverbs. Likewise, the stamps' arrangement on the cloth helps to create meaning, even inspiring the naming of traditional *adinkra* cloths.



Traditionally, people of royal status would wear *adinkra* to a variety of religious ceremonies and funerals since these textiles are strongly associated with mourning and death. The Asante began to decorate *adinkra* as a means of expressing their feelings and sharing stories, and today they are made for commercial sale.

Grace Williams '18

History Major and Education Minor

Asante peoples, Ghana

Cloth (kente), 20th century

Rayon, assorted fibers

The College of Wooster Art Museum 1985.19

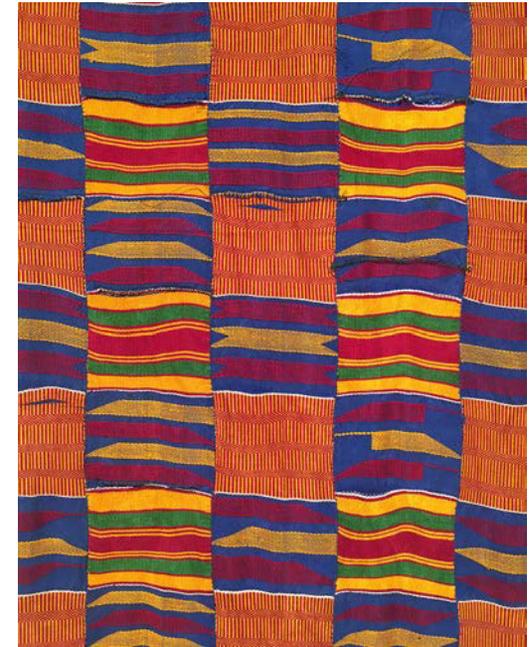
Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953



Bold geometric shapes and dazzling multicolored patterns characterize kente's visual effect. Strips of cloth sewn together comprise this fabric. Each design contains symbolic colors and patterns. It visually represents history, philosophy, ethics, religious belief, and political thought.

While the *asantehene*, or paramount king, was the original patron of kente cloth, today Akan weavers produce kente for a commercial market. The example here includes fourteen different designs. Each traditional cloth pattern has its own name and meaning derived from proverbs, historical events, and natural elements.

Color schemes, named patterns, and the preponderance of gold emphasize aspects of strength, leadership, and kingship through the visual-verbal nexus as explained in conjunction with the linguist staff finial in this exhibition. In and of itself, gold indicates royalty, wealth, status, glory, and spiritual purity.



Amrin Remtulla '19

WGSS Major and Education Minor

Akan peoples, Cote d'Ivoire

Linguist staff finial (okyeame),

20th century

Wood

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2007.119

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953, and

Renee-Paule Moyencourt



When the *asantehene* appears in state, many orators or *akyeame*, stand at his side. They speak for him in public, emphasizing the king's liminal, semi-divine status, treading the line between the human and the spiritual world.

The linguist's staff finial operates within the visual-verbal nexus, a dynamic system of visual images that interact with verbal expressions, especially proverbs.

“We speak to a wise man in proverbs, not in plain speech,” goes one saying, suggesting that informed Akan viewers understand the multivalent meanings behind visual kingship.

Kara Morrow and
Alex Wendt '17
Art History and English
Double Major

Akan peoples, Côte d'Ivoire/Ghana
Crown, 20th century

Velvet, cardboard, gold leaf

Akan peoples, Côte d'Ivoire/Ghana
Headband, 20th century

Velvet, wood, gold leaf

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2007.183 and 2007.166
Gifts of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953, and
Renee-Paule Moyencourt



Gold supported the Akan economy while providing a form of currency into the colonial period. As such, gold—the metal and the color—informs the regalia and trappings of kingship in Akan culture. In addition to its gold foil-covered surface, this Akan crown also has accents of swords running along the gold band. Swords are symbolic of a chief's authority and are used during oaths of allegiance. The king, or *asantehene*, typically maintains a retinue of sword carrying “soul protectors,” who enhance his unearthly, almost divine, position.

Because gold ornaments represent status, protection, and wellbeing, they often decorate objects that only belong to the chief or king. In the headband seen here, the cross-like rosettes with the pointed centers are most likely *musuyidie*, or charms intended for protection.

Alex Wendt '17
Art History and English Double Major

Fante peoples, Ghana

Asafo Company “Cloth of the Great,”

20th century

Wool, imported fabric, ribbon

The College of Wooster Art Museum 1989.3

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953



Akan proverbs:

Even the elephant is unable to uproot the palm tree.

Unable to defeat the palm tree, the elephant makes friends with it.

An essential part of Fante culture is the use of proverbs that express a common truth. The motifs stitched onto this *asafo* flag provide visualizations of some specific Ghanaian proverbs with abstract animals and nature symbols. *Asafo* flags are often associated with funerals and social activities. Companies parade them around the town, particularly past the houses of *asafo* chiefs, demonstrating their renewed allegiances.

The motifs—moons, rifles, swords, and animals—support symbolic or metaphorical meanings such as harmony, power, and protection. The most common proverb referenced on this “Cloth of the Great,” is about the elephant and the palm tree. It provides a commentary on the relationship between power and social responsibility. Even the most powerful among us must work productively with those who might oppose him or her.



Grace Williams '18

History Major and Education Minor

Yoruba peoples, Nigeria

Helmet mask (epa), 20th century

Wood, pigment

The College of Wooster Art Museum 1985.6

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953



The Epa mask signals power and lineage in the Yoruba community. Its size and symbolism promote cultural heroes who represent ancestral lines. In a seven-day ceremony, all members are involved in the celebration of the Efele, the cult of ancestral spirits, and Epa, ancient male spirits. Only a male performer capable of holding the weight of his community on his shoulders wears the mask. The smaller figures surrounding the large hero atop the structure represent the role of citizen and civic responsibility.

The community-warrior relationship is a symbiotic one promoting the welfare and livelihoods of each other. Another symbol of protection is the equine character who not only carries the warrior but guides him through unknown lands.

Michael Herman '17
Political Science Major



Yoruba Peoples, Nigeria

Divination bowl (agere Ifa), 20th century

Wood

Divination tray (opon Ifa), 20th century

Wood

The College of Wooster Art Museum 1976.6 and 1976.5

Gifts of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953



Yoruba diviners, or *babalawos*, commission finely carved objects for Ifa divination ceremonies. These rituals request guidance from Orunmila, the God of Destiny, on behalf of clients; however, before Orunmila can provide direction, Eshu, the trickster/messenger God of Fate, must provide access.

Between sessions, the *babalawo* stores sixteen cowrie shells required for the ritual in a divination bowl. Idealized female figures often support such bowls, imbuing the cowrie shells with *ashe*, or power, with which the Yoruba believe the female body overflows. The exaggerated features—such as the extended breasts, the enlarged belly, the scarification patterns, and the detailed coiffure—suggest the power of the female body to give and sustain life, which is *ashe*.

During Ifa divination, the diviner covers a divination tray with sawdust and divides the surface into quadrants representing the spiritual and physical aspects of the Yoruba world. Eshu must traverse these realms in order to communicate the *babalawo*'s message to Orunmila. The diviner raps on the tray with a tapper attracting Eshu's attention. He casts the cowrie shells across the tray, which scatter through Eshu's intervention. This process is repeated eight times. The resulting patterns indicate one of 256 possible verses the diviner will recite, allowing the client to interpret and apply the verses to his or her life's circumstances.

Emily Walker '17

Anthropology and Classics Double Major

Yoruba peoples, Nigeria

Staff (shango), 20th century

Wood, pigment

The College of Wooster Art Museum 1976.2

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953



Yoruba peoples, Nigeria

Staff (shango), 20th century

Wood

The College of Wooster Art Museum 2007.190

Gift of William C. Mithoefer, Class of 1953,

and Renee-Paule Moyencourt



Shango, an *orisha*, or god in Yorubaland, emerges from the oral histories of historical/mythic kingship. A tyrannical ruler, Shango's adversaries drove him to abdicate his throne and commit suicide. Nevertheless, his adherents proclaimed his divine status over mystical and magical natural elements. Today, Shango hurls flashes of lightning during storms that appear on the ground as ancient stone hand axes after storms.

In order to appease Shango's notorious temper and elicit the *orisha's* goodwill, devotees of Shango dance publicly with staffs that celebrate his power. The staff can even induce an individual's possession by the *orisha*. Double axes and blue pigment on the dance staffs reflect the practitioner's efforts to channel and control Shango's temper and convert it into "coolness."

Natalie Souleyrette '19

History Major