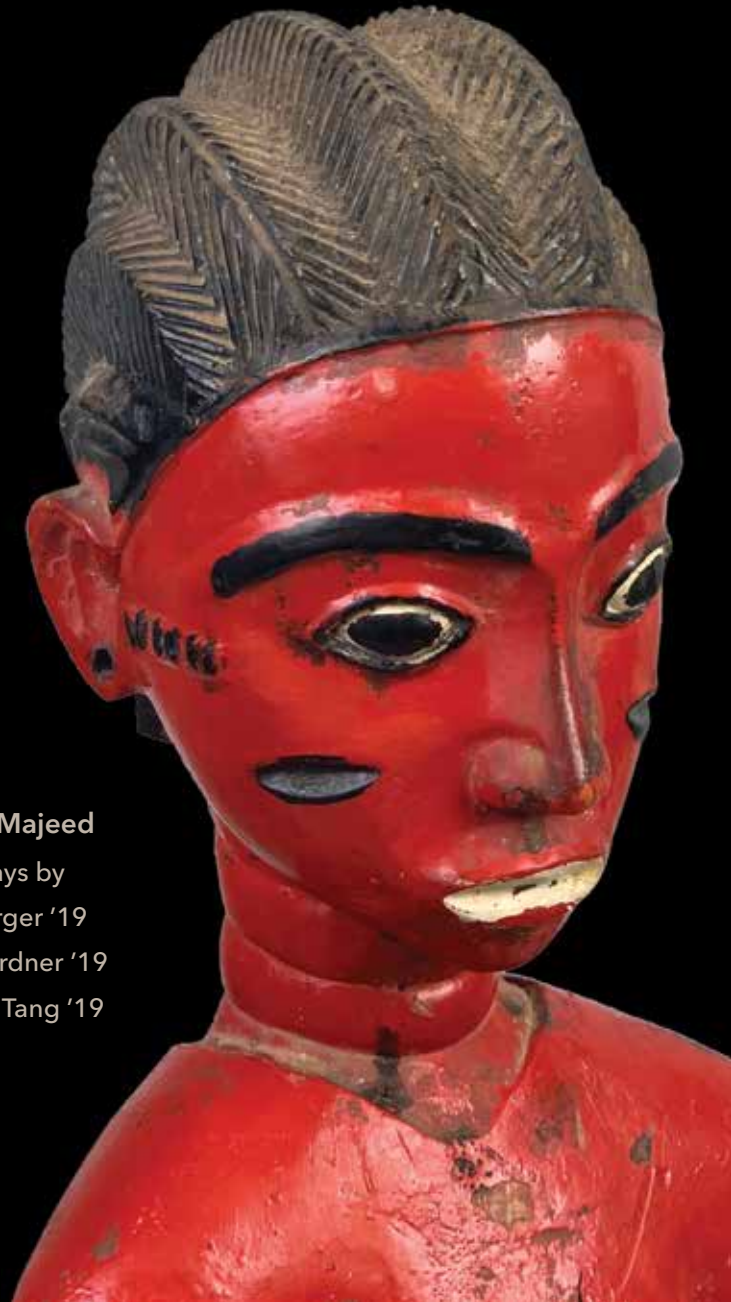
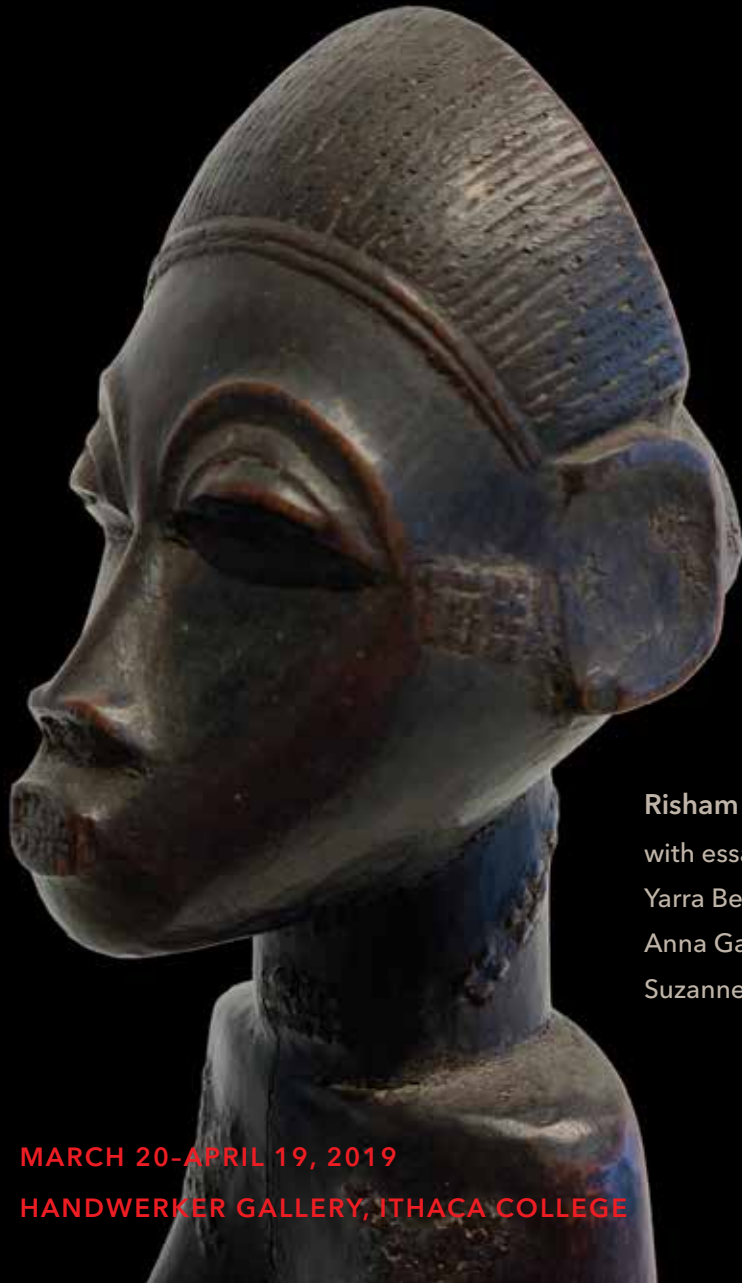


GET REAL

SEEKING AUTHENTICITY
IN AFRICAN ART



Risham Majeed

with essays by

Yarra Berger '19

Anna Gardner '19

Suzanne Tang '19

MARCH 20-APRIL 19, 2019

HANDWERKER GALLERY, ITHACA COLLEGE



Acknowledgments

An exhibition is a reminder of the value and rewards of collaboration. I am grateful foremost to the students in the Fall 2018 Exhibition Seminar: *African Art and Authenticity*: Yarra Berger ('19), Anna Gardner ('19), and Suzanne Tang ('19). All three worked tirelessly and with humor to help conceive and execute this exhibition. I would also like to thank colleagues who participated in the seminar for their time and expertise: Jean Fritts, Karen Milbourne, and Carol Thompson.

Thanks are due to Mara Baldwin and the Handwerker Gallery for supporting and facilitating the installation of the exhibition and producing its catalogue. None of this would have been possible without the backing of the Department of Art History, especially the work of Randi Millman-Brown and Julia Yang. A major thanks also to Wade Pickren at the Center for Faculty Excellence for providing funds for the exhibition, its catalogue, and programming.

We are grateful for the generosity of Aimée and Johannes Lehmann who parted with some of their beloved objects for our benefit; their collection has enriched our own. I would also like to thank Andrew Weislogel and Matthew Conway at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University for providing important loans, essential to the arguments of the exhibition. An immense debt of gratitude is owed to Amyas Naegele, who opened up his wonderful collection for us to choose from liberally; the exhibition would have been impossible without his support.

Finally, I want to thank my teachers who first put me on this path. Linda Seidel and Susan Vogel have been my generous mentors and friends for many years. Susan has helped refine the ideas developed in this exhibition through sparring and discussion (to be continued). Amongst many other things, Linda is a model for teaching and working with students, and the fruits of her role through this process will be evident to her. We have all benefitted from their quiet participation.

Front cover: Unrecorded Sculptors, Spirit Wife (Baule, Ivory Coast). Left: late 19th-early 20th century. Private Collection, New York. Right: c. 1950s-60s. Collection of Amyas Naegele. Photos: Risham Majeed



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Unrecorded Sculptor, Helmet Mask for the Sande Society, mid-20th century
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Photo: Randi Millman-Brown



Get Real: Seeking Authenticity in African Art, installation in the Handwerker Gallery of "Art and Artifact" section (March 20–April 19, 2019). Photo: Risham Majeed

INTRODUCTION

AFTERLIVES OF AFRICAN ART

Risham Majeed

...a translation issues
from the original —
not so much from its
life as from its afterlife.

— *Walter Benjamin*,
“The Task of the Translator”

The notion of authenticity has underpinned the study, collecting, display, and manufacture of African art ever since these objects entered European, and later American collections and institutions. While the characteristics that constitute an “authentic” object might vary according to who is inquiring, there has been a remarkable consistency regarding this question. For auction houses, collectors, and fine art museums, “real” African art is produced by a “traditional” artist, for a “traditional” purpose. It has to have fulfilled its ritual or numinous purpose *before* it left the continent to enter either the market, or an institution.

The market critically sustains this definition of authenticity, yet commodification of the authentic object is, with few exceptions, not adequately integrated into the reception histories of African art. Just as soon as there was an external market for African art, objects were made to be sold. Indeed, fakes, or objects made with the express purpose of fooling an audience, begin to be manufactured at the height of the colonial project from the 1880s into the present. These are wily objects, tailored to the expectations of the market: they can have a lustrous, dark patina, accompanied by other signs of age and use (dirt, from being buried), and a canonical adherence to the expectations of the style of a particular ethnic group. The fake takes its brief from the taste of the collector; it is a mirror of what we expect to see when we are looking at the “authentic” object.



Unrecorded Sculptor, "Deformity Mask" for the *Ekpo Society*, first half of the 20th century (Ibibio, Nigeria). Collection of Aimée and Johannes Lehmann.
Photo: Randi Millman-Brown



Unrecorded Sculptor, "Deformity Mask" for the *Ekpo Society*, first half of the 20th century (Ibibio, Nigeria). Collection of the Handwerker Gallery, Ithaca College.
Photo: Randi Millman-Brown

The exhibition, *Get Real: Seeking Authenticity in African Art*, and its catalogue pursue the repercussions of such evanescent perceptions and tastes. It analyzes how African art has served an ambassadorial role for ideas, identities, and institutions, which are quite foreign to its original audiences. Themes in the exhibition demonstrate the plurality of the reception histories of African art in European and American contexts. Some of these topics have been included here as part of the catalogue: "Authorship and Anonymity" examines how we choose to represent individual African sculptors in exhibitions; "'Tradition': Everything Old is New Again" considers how the taste of the Western collector can be at odds with the tastes of the original users and makers of the objects; finally "Art and Artifact," shows how tenuous this distinction can be for the historical arts of Africa.

The essays in this volume expand these themes and pursue them through disparate case studies. Anna Gardner's essay traces how the museological frame can affect the perception of a single object over a hundred-year span. She examines the "God of War," (*Fon*, Republic of Benin) a nearly life-size metal sculpture, which has been widely exhibited from ethnographic museums to the Museum of Modern Art, to its current resting place in the hallowed galleries of the Pavillon des Sessions at the Louvre in Paris. Her essay focusses our attention most directly on how the design and methods of display can color, taint, or accentuate an audience's perception of the meaning and worth of an object.

Suzanne Tang's essay considers how museums become canon making spaces, using the Museum of Primitive Art and its later iteration in the Rockefeller Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art as her case studies. She argues that the cult of personality of Nelson

Rockefeller, famous collector, philanthropist, and governor of New York, legitimated the collection and made it a paradigmatic resource for future collectors and institutions to emulate. After all it is through repetition that a consensus builds, and a canon is formed.

Finally, Yarra Berger's essay, "Fashion Forward: Helena Rubinstein's and Frank Crowninshield's Collections of African Art," shows how African art could become an extension of the alterity of the collector, whether that was an eastern European Jewish woman in post WWI New York in the case of Helena Rubinstein, or a gay man in the case of Frank Crowninshield, editor of *Vanity Fair*. For Rubinstein and Crowninshield, their embrace of an art form that was then considered to be "primitive" and "other" at the time they were forming their collections, may have served as a rebuke to the silent slights they experienced as being "other" in high society.

This exhibition and its catalogue are about the work of translation: we operate with the understanding that the language of the original, though readily available, is simultaneously suppressed, as we encounter it through, in Benjamin's words, its "afterlife." The curators of this exhibition are interested in charting how African art has been interpreted and misinterpreted, in its many afterlives through the 19th-21st centuries. As curators, we are always engaged in an act of translation, which has an imperfect relationship to the original. In translating an object, just as one would a text, we can never transmit the veracity of the original, but only create a new text, or new object through the translation. The translated text, akin to the object in a collection or museum, is a shadow of the original. It may retain its essential contours and presence, but it is ineluctably something else.



CHANGE FROM WITHIN

AFRICAN ART ON DISPLAY

Anna Gardner



Above and opposite: Akati Ekplékendo, *Gou, God of War and Iron*, before 1858 (Fon, Republic of Benin). Former collection of the Museum of Ethnography, Trocadéro; now installed at the Pavillon des Sessions, Louvre, Paris. Photos: Nicole Griggs (2019)

The definition of authenticity in African art is controlled by systems outside of its immediate modes of production. One such system is the museum: exhibition design and didactics indelibly inform the audience's perception of African art.

As the anthropologist and cultural historian Sally Price argues, the museum system manufactures a "tug-of-war between 'art' and 'anthropology.'"¹ The presentation of African art has oscillated from an ethnographic presentation, whereby the object becomes representative of religious and social context, or a formal one, which denudes the object, divesting it of its ritual attachments so that it can be considered purely as sculpture. However, both these modes are required in order to communicate the multivalent meanings of the arts of Africa. But how can museums restructure exhibition design to address this complexity? This essay explores this question through the changing fates of a single sculpture, first brought to France in the late 19th century.

Ingeniously forged from iron, the statue of *Gou*, or the "God of War," was created by the sculptor Akati Ekplékendo. Seized in 1894 during the French conquest of Dahomey,² it was brought back to France and subsequently donated to the Museum of Ethnography at the Trocadéro Palace. Within the walls of the Museum of Ethnography (later renamed the Museum of Man) artifacts collected from Africa and Oceania served as surrogates for absent places and persons. Installed alongside other life-sized sculptures dedicated to kings, together they came to signify French dominion over Dahomey in the galleries of the Trocadéro.



Trocadéro Palace, Paris (built 1878, destroyed 1937), postcard dated 1912

During the 1930s, the Museum of Ethnography, changed its name to the Museum of Man, reflecting new theories of universalism that were circulating in French ethnographic circles at that time. The name change was accompanied by a heightened awareness of the scientific mission of the museum, and so it re-installed its galleries organized by region and ethnic group, in clear vitrines with contextual photographs and explanatory labels.

In France, the Trocadéro museum was linked to the colonial project: the expansion of the museum's collection was possible because ethnographers engaged in collecting missions to regions controlled by the French government. In the same years, African art had also arrived in America. In New York during the first third of the twentieth century, African art was inextricably tied to Modernist Primitivism. It was rarely, if ever shown on its own, but rather exclusively with Modernist painting because avant-garde artists (Picasso and his circle) had appropriated and collected African art ever since Picasso's first visit to the Trocadéro in 1906. Indeed the first exhibition of African art in America was at Alfred Stieglitz's 291 Gallery; its title indicates the close relationship between Modern and African art: "Statuary in Wood by African Savages: The Root of Modern Art," (1914).

At the very same time that the Trocadéro museum was transforming its galleries to resemble a laboratory, the nascent Museum of Modern Art, was moving in the total opposite direction with its exhibition, "African Negro Art" (1935).³ The curator of this ambitious exhibition, J.J. Sweeney was concerned singularly with the "plastic" or formal qualities of African art, with little regard for its cultural context. On loan from the Trocadéro, the statue of *Gou* was installed on a circular plinth with ample space around it, so that the viewer could encircle the object and admire it from all sides. Unlike the Trocadéro's lengthy didactics, Sweeney only included the most discrete and barely discernible identifying labels.

In 1957 the Museum of Primitive Art (MPA) was founded by Nelson A. Rockefeller, and installed in a townhouse across the street from MoMA. A retort to the ethnographic museum, the MPA's adopted the stark white cube installation of MoMA but it began to distinguish between different ethnic groups, as more information and scholarship became available in the 1950's and 1960's under the leadership of its director Robert Goldwater, who was himself a Modernist scholar.

Museums dedicated to African art began to emerge in the United States, such as the MPA and the National Museum of African Art in 1964. The autonomy of such institutions was tied to the politics of civil rights in America, and thus their narratives were also (however, imperfectly) tied to ideas of liberation and social justice.

Equivalent institutions, which presented African art as art, were slower to appear in France, because of the legacy of colonialism. The Museum of Man was divided in the late 1990s and its collection dispersed chiefly between the Louvre and newly founded *Musée du Quai Branly* (MQB). Announced by President Jacques Chirac in 1996, the MQB would be built as an institution devoted to the arts of Africa, America, Asia, and Oceania with a new campus built along the left bank of the Seine. Its architect, Jean Nouvel, described the MQB as a space, "where everything is designed to evoke an emotional

response to the primary object.”⁴ However, in these dark, cavernous spaces, the “primary” object does not feel too far from the “primitive” object.

The MQB opened in 2006 with a mission to bridge the gap between the presentation of African art as document and aesthetic object. Maureen Murphy, a scholar of African art who has studied these museums in depth, suggests that in order to be a truly progressive space, an accurate history of the racially charged political provenance of African art objects should be an integral component of their display and didactics.⁵ Until then, the MQB, is manifestly still a colonial style ethnographic museum with a new name.⁶

Exhibiting African art in museums is inevitably intertwined with the imbalances of colonial power structures that facilitated its availability in Europe. The MQB eliminates this complexity, and in so doing silently extends old hierarchies. This reality should be acknowledged in the exhibition of African art. As with the changing context around the *Gou* sculpture, transformations of African art are at the mercy of the institution.

What then is the solution to the art and anthropology “tug-of-war” in the exhibition of African art? Can African art be shown in a manner that accentuates its aesthetic qualities *and* function, with adequate recognition of Europe’s pilfering past?⁷ A tall order. But these conditions could become the brief of the “decolonized museum.” Such a display would be one that accepts the legacy of colonialism in the West and acknowledges the ongoing repercussions of this violent past in contemporary society. These acknowledgments must be made clearly and widely across the museum, especially when it comes to the exhibition of works that have entered collections through dubious means.

Today, the “God of War,” has entered the hallowed halls of the universal art museum *par excellence*: the Louvre. Installed in crystalline spaces of the Pavillon des Sessions, he stands alone, fixed in a pool of boutique lighting, with the same label he had over a hundred years ago at the Trocadéro: “*Gou*, God of War.” *Plus ça change*.



Unrecorded Sculptors, *Sculptures dedicated to Kings Béhanzin and Guézo*, 19th century (Fon, Republic of Benin). Installed at the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris. Photo: Risham Majeed (2008)

- 1 Price, Sally, *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac’s Museum on the Quai Branly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 171.
- 2 Murphy, Maureen, “From the Battlefield to the Museum: The Tribulations of a Fon Sculpture”, in *History of art and anthropology* (Paris: Musée du Quai Branly, 2009). <http://journals.openedition.org/actesbranly/213>
- 3 All of the installation photographs of the 1935 MoMA exhibition are available online: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2937>
- 4 Nouvel, Jean, “Musée Du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac,” accessed December 19, 2018. <http://www.jeannouvel.com/en/projects/musee-du-quai-branly/>
- 5 Murphy, Maureen, “Between Arts Works and Documents: The Arts of Africa in Paris and New York in the 1930s,” in *Arts and Societies*, posted on November 23, 2006, accessed on December 19, 2018. <http://www.sciencespo.fr/artsetsocietes/en/archives/2490>
- 6 Price (2007), p.114-115.
- 7 Ibid, p. 171.



The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The core collection from the former Museum of Primitive Art takes center stage. Photo: Risham Majeed (2018)

CHAPTER 2

GOLD STANDARD

FROM THE MUSEUM OF PRIMITIVE ART TO THE MET

Suzanne Tang



Official Portrait of Nelson Rockefeller as Vice President of the United States. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The history of art is governed by a hierarchal system that privileges works of originality and quality, which is known as the canon. These works then set the standard for other works from the same period and place, even though they are frequently and paradoxically exceptional examples. The canon is full of such constrictions and contradictions. The canon of African art is no exception. It was formed by art dealers and private collectors and later reinforced by museum collections, which delivered the canon as a consensus to the general public. This essay will present the instrumental role that the Museum of Primitive Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art have played in fashioning the canon of African art.

Though there had been numerous collectors of African art since the early 20th century, none had the reach and influence of Nelson Rockefeller; his family was not only one of the wealthiest in America, but they were celebrated as the preeminent prominent philanthropical family in New York city, intimately involved with the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art. His renown and influence was further accentuated by his political career: he was the governor of New York state (1959-1974) and went on to become the Vice

President of the United States (1974–1977), making him a national and global figure. His patronage elevated the Museum of Primitive Art's prestige and credibility, and as the first museum of its kind in a major metropolis, it became the canon defining institution of its time.

The Museum of Primitive Art was created "to study, collect, and exhibit the artistic traditions of Africa, Oceania and the Americas as works of fine art rather than approach them through an ethnographic or anthropological lens, the prevailing institutional tendencies that had long isolated those traditions from the larger history of art."¹ It was located inside a townhouse owned by the Rockefellers. Since it was intended to be a residence rather than a public museum, it had limited space for exhibiting works. As a result, the Museum of Primitive Art had an active loan policy – participating in a stream of traveling exhibitions and education programs to further spread its mission of incorporating African art into the realm of fine art.²

The great innovation of the Museum of Primitive Art was loaning objects to museums in Africa, after decolonization. Having African objects – ones from the collection of a figure of international standing – exhibited in Africa indicated that African cultures could now be considered on par with western aesthetic standards.

In addition to spearheading the display of historical African art in Africa, the Museum of Primitive Art also loaned to universities, especially historically black colleges. By making his collection public through forming a museum, Nelson Rockefeller solidified his stature as a pioneer of collecting African art and ensured the canonization of his collection while preserving his legacy. Through providing access to African objects with loans and traveling exhibitions, the MPA enabled a variety of audiences to be exposed to African art who might never have traveled to New York City. After all, the canon derives its authority through repeated exposure to the same objects, whether through exhibitions or reproduction.

When the Museum of Primitive Art closed in 1976, its collection was donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art which still houses that collection in the Michael C. Rockefeller wing. A canonical collection, as set forth by the Met, inspires other collections, both private and public, to collect similar objects. The determination of authenticity in African art is endorsed by the canon; Furthermore, objects that resemble the canonical ones are frequently considered authentic, even though it is through their very reproducibility that forgeries are made to resemble objects in famous collections. The Met's core collection, guided by the taste of Nelson Rockefeller, remains the gold standard for authenticity and desirability. However immutable, the canon serves a purpose, and Rockefeller's donation has ensured a secure place for African art for generations to come.

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- 1 LaGamma, Alisa, "The Nelson A. Rockefeller Vision: In Pursuit of the Best," in *The Nelson A. Rockefeller Vision: Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014) p. 4-5.
 - 2 Biro, Yaëlle "The Museum of Primitive Art in Africa at the Time of Independence," *Ibid*, p. 38.

Opposite: Lela Kouakou (Benoît), *Spirit Spouse*, c. 1960 (Baule, Yamoussoukro Region, Ivory Coast). This sculpture was carved on commission from Kofi Alany. It was photographed by Susan Vogel in his personal shrine in the village of Kami in 1978 and at that time it was painted a fiery red (like the cover image). It was subsequently sold in the early 1980s and treated by local dealers in Abidjan with a film of Elmer's glue and dust to mute the bright surface, in order to appeal to market taste. Coincidentally, it was offered for sale to Vogel, by the Dutch art dealer Anushka Menist in New York (c.1986–89). Vogel recognized it as the figure she had encountered *in situ* and it is now in her personal collection. It is a rare instance where we have the biographies of both the sculptor who made the figure and its original owner, alongside specific documentation regarding its subsequent journey into the market in Africa, Europe, and finally to New York City. Photos: Susan M. Vogel





Get Real: Seeking Authenticity in African Art, installation in the Handwerker Gallery of "Freud to Frasier" section (March 20–April 19, 2019). Photo: Risham Majeed

FASHION FORWARD

HELENA RUBINSTEIN AND FRANK CROWNINSHIELD'S COLLECTIONS OF AFRICAN ART

Yarra Berger

...ownership is the most
intimate relationship that
one can have to objects.
Not that they come alive
in him; it is he who lives
in them

— Walter Benjamin,
"Unpacking my Library"

Collecting is a deeply personal, conscious act that can become integral to an individual's personal and public identity. When displayed publicly, a collection becomes an extension and a surrogate for the collector's tastes and values, which can be deliberately at odds with the prevailing mores of the time.¹

An object and its owner share a symbiotic relationship that projects itself in public and private. Collectors that live public lives or exist in a highly visible social sphere know this and collect accordingly. They deliberately acquire objects that will enhance, shift, or reinforce a carefully crafted public image. Suspicion of alterity can enhance or diminish the reputation of a prominent figure. Immigrant Americans working in the early 20th century knew that their image was everything. They understood that an individual is conflated with their profession, especially if that business involves the everyday social activities of the average American.

Helena Rubinstein (1872-1965) and Frank Crowninshield (1872-1947) grasped the force of a well-cultivated image and used this power to their advantage; projecting their personal taste onto the elite of New York City in an effort to expand their personal business



Left: Helena Rubinstein, cosmetics mogul. Right: Francis "Frank" Crowninshield, editor of *Vanity Fair* (1914–1935). Photos: Wikimedia Commons

and economic endeavors. Rubinstein and Crowninshield, came to New York from disparate backgrounds but came to work in related fields which harnessed their personalities into marketable products and recognizable brands. Rubinstein owned a large beauty business, while Crowninshield edited the literary magazine *Vanity Fair*. They positioned themselves as tastemakers at the forefront of a sophisticated counterculture; oppositional to the older exemplars of taste and wealth.

The decision to collect and display African art was a sociopolitical one; collecting African art helped establish Rubinstein and Crowninshield as progressive frontrunners in the world of arts and culture. This essay argues that their decision to collect African art, at the time a marginal and politically charged field, was propelled by their own identities as a Jewish woman and a man rumored to be gay in an age when neither identity was embraced, much less celebrated.

African art objects would have been desired cultural signifiers due to their perceived "exotic" or "outsider" status when compared to the normative aesthetics of Western art in the first half of the twentieth century. Practically and politically, African art had a transformative power based on its associations of cultural deviance from the Western norm.² Artists and intellectuals appropriated African art as a way to validate their own

alterity or "otherness," which went hand-in-hand with the desire to push the boundaries of accepted taste. This alienation is similarly felt by marginalized groups who are structurally exempt from successfully participating in mainstream society. Rubinstein and Crowninshield might have been shielded from the more severe forms of alienation (physical violence, social ostracization) due to their wealth in a diverse metropolis. However, status does not necessarily make an individual immune to the realities of more collective and structural forms of oppression levied on Jewish people and the gay community.

Rubinstein and Crowninshield acknowledged their respective identities through their personal actions. These actions are best exemplified in their oppositional relationships with Elizabeth Arden and Condé Nast. After creating a successful company abroad, Rubinstein faced entrenched anti-Semitism in New York where she was unable to open a boutique on Fifth Avenue. In order to become successful, Rubinstein used African art and Modernist decor to intentionally separate herself from Arden and her traditional Anglo-American clients.

Arden and Rubinstein were ruthless rivals, but Crowninshield had a more constructive relationship with Nast. Hired by him as the editor of *Vanity Fair*, Crowninshield clashed with Nast over style, sponsorship, and vision. Nast wanted to market *Vanity Fair* to a corporatized image of male dominated domestic America, Crowninshield hired feminist authors and included images of African art.³ Crowninshield was suspected of being gay throughout his career. He never married or publicly had a girlfriend, and later lived with a divorced Nast. When questioned about this living arrangement, Crowninshield reportedly responded, "I suppose they thought we were fairies."⁴ Being tongue-in-cheek, Crowninshield could have meant this comment in a variety of ways. The word "gay" was used with dual meaning in *Vanity Fair*, something that added to the supposed "somewhat homosexual flavor" of the magazine's atmosphere or staff.⁵

Displaying African art became central to the alternative forms of taste and wealth promoted by



Rubinstein and Crowninshield. Both collected personally but soon extended their collections to the public through print, storefronts, and art exhibitions. The 1935 landmark exhibition, "African Negro Art" (1935) at the Museum of Modern Art included objects from both their collections. This exhibition was incredibly influential to how African art is displayed and categorized in American art institutions. The objects included in the exhibition, almost immediately became canonical and their lofty status is exemplified by the record-breaking prices commanded by the Rubinstein collection when it was auctioned after her death.⁶

Rubinstein's and Crowninshield's decision to collect African art was a choice that consciously distanced themselves from the norms of American high society represented by their mainstream colleagues (and rivals) Elizabeth Arden and Condé Nast. By weaponizing their difference in taste, Rubinstein and Crowninshield carved out a unique arena for themselves, and for African art in America.

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- 1 The literature on the history of collecting is vast (see select bibliography). Particularly formative for the ideas presented here were Walter Benjamin's "Unpacking my Library," and James Clifford's "Collecting Ourselves," in *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).
 - 2 Price, Sally, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 47.
 - 3 Ward, Cynthia, "Vanity Fair Magazine and the Modern Style 1914-1936" (University Microfilms International: 1983), p. 1-50.
 - 4 As recounted in Ward (1983).
 - 5 Behling, Laura, *The Masculine Woman in America 1890-1935* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 130.
 - 6 Klein, Mason, *Helena Rubinstein: Beauty Is Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

Left: Unrecorded Sculptor, *Spirit Wife*, late 19th-early 20th century (Baule, Ivory Coast). Formerly in the collection of Frank Crowninshield, now in a private collection, New York. Photo: Risham Majeed



Buli Master, *Female figure with bowl*, mid-19th century (Luba or Hemba, Democratic Republic of Congo). Royal Museum of Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium



Unrecorded Copyist, copy of a figure by the sculptor known as the "Buli Master", ca. 1810–1870 (Luba or Hemba, Democratic Republic of Congo). Collection of Aimée and Johannes Lehmann. Photo: Randi Millman-Brown

AUTHORSHIP AND ANONYMITY

It gives me great pleasure not to know the artist's name. Once you have found out the artist's name, the object ceases to be primitive art.¹

So proclaimed a Parisian collector interviewed by the anthropologist and cultural historian Sally Price. The myth of the anonymous artist is one that sustains the notion that African sculptors fail to apprehend the value of their own intellectual creativity and thus cannot be regarded as individual geniuses. This powerful untruth is perpetuated by substituting an entire ethnic group for the name of a sculptor. In this exhibition we seek to acknowledge past omissions and to return distinctive skill to the maker by employing the phrase "unrecorded sculptor."

In historical African cultures, the success of an object was tied to how well it fulfilled the brief of the patron *and* on its aesthetic merit. African artists, like most artists the world over before the Renaissance, were known in their own communities, and only the best artists would receive the most important commissions. Such was the case with the sculptor known as the "Buli Master" (named by art historians after the village in which he worked), who carved in a highly original manner for Luba and Hemba court cultures. The Buli Master's expressive elongation, an innovation within an established set of visual expectations for this type of object, is a hallmark of his individual style. His figures have a strong profile, whereby the elegant point of the nose is put in dialogue with the gravity defying eyebrows, features that render an object immediately recognizable as the work of this master.

The individual who produced this skilled copy, clearly only had access to a photograph of the front and profile of the figure. The original has an elaborate



Detail of the back of Lehmann copy (opposite page)

coiffure, rendered through a dynamic cross-crossing of patterned planes, whereas in the copy it is a void.

COPIES AND FAKES

There is a fine line between a "copy" and a "fake." After all, both are recreations of an original. It is the relationship that the re-maker claims between their product and the prototype that leads to its classification as a forgery or a copy. In this case, the collector informs us that there was no element of deceit in the transaction with the dealer. Since the object is not lying to us, we can consider it a copy, after the Buli Master.

1 Sally Price quoted in Sidney Kasfir, "African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow," *African Art* 25 (1992), p. 44.

ART AND ARTIFACT



Unrecorded Sculptors, 2 whistles, first half of the 20th century (Lobi and Bwa, Burkina Faso). Collection of Amyas Naegele. *These whistles, or mini-flutes, are versions of the same highly abstract rendering of a human body seemingly at attention with hands planted firmly on the hips. They have holes on either side, which can produce three to four notes akin to European hand bells. The shape of the whistle is also ergonomic: it rests comfortably in the palm of one's hand.*

The artist's work is his intention. There's this curious dichotomy in the West about form and content. The form is the content. I think the work of artists is to be useful. — James Baldwin¹

Most African art was not intended to be displayed to anyone other than their owner, or a carefully initiated and specialized audience. Such objects were not available publicly for aesthetic admiration as they are in an exhibition context.

On the other hand, heddle pulleys were made specifically for such conspicuous viewing. Because they do not carry any spiritual or sacred significance, they can be viewed by all. West African weavers, always male, practice their craft in the public spaces of the village where passers-by are free to engage intricately carved trinkets such as heddle pulleys. Members of the village had the opportunity to touch and admire these miniature sculptures and converse about them with one another and the weaver. Whereas no one would ever ask an owner about the origin of an object meant for a ritual purpose, inquiries about such comparatively insignificant items were not subject to the same interdictions.

These objects' lack of spiritual/sacred efficacy allowed them to function as a tacit advertisement for the sculptor's skill and ingenuity. Often such pulleys are highly refined miniatures of superior quality to more monumental figures and masks. They are integral to the work of the weaver yet they exceed their functionality by eliciting visual delight through their emphatic presence as sculpture. Knowing this, how can we separate "art" from "artifact"?

1 James Baldwin interviewed in *Perspectives: Angles on African Art* (New York: Center for African Art, 1987), p. 114.



Unrecorded Sculptors, 3 Heddle Pulleys, first half of the 20th century. *Left to right:* Bamana, Senufo (Mali). Collection of Amyas Naegele

TRADITION

EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN



Unrecorded Sculptor, *Spirit Wife*, c. 1950s–60s (Baule, Ivory Coast). Collection of Amyas Naegele. Photo: Risham Majeed

Authenticity for museums and collectors in Europe and America can be at odds with the expectations of an object's users and makers. Here we have a series of sculptures known as "spirit spouses" in Baule (Ivory Coast) culture. The oldest of this type of object has a deep lustrous patina which communicates the frequent handling that resulted in the gleaming skin that collectors admire and desire. This dark surface also indicates the age of the object which is sought-after by collectors but would have been regarded as a defect by a Baule patron of a subsequent generation. Spirit spouses are made to mirror current tastes of beauty and allure, so an old sculpture would have been deemed outdated, and therefore unable to attract the spirit of the spouse left behind.

The second figure is of a later generation. According to Susan Vogel, a leading authority on Baule art,

*This workshop was fairly prolific and my sense is that they produced modernized figures starting rather early: figures with straight legs in naturalistic proportions; only slightly darkened wood; a protuberant and naturalistic eye with defined eyelid and pupil; finally whereas in the older style flesh is rendered as geometry, here the desire is for flesh to be flesh. These sculptors worked for local clients but also for the external market.*¹

Painted figures, such as the one on the left, reflect a change in taste among Baule clients and sculptors, who continued to modernize the type, with imported paint, wristwatches, and western-style clothing. Paradoxically, the older patina considered to be authentic in museums and collections, ceased to be desirable for Baule



Left: Unrecorded Sculptor,
Spirit Wife, late 19th–early 20th
century (Baule, Ivory Coast).
Private Collection, New York.

Right: Unrecorded Sculptor,
Spirit Wife, c. 1950s–60s
(Baule, Ivory Coast).
Provenance: Ruth Schaffner,
Nairobi, 1995; Collection of
Johannes and Aimée
Lehmann. Photo: Risham
Majeed

patrons beginning around mid-20th century, who preferred the bright flash of color in their personal shrines.

Museum taste recoils at all painted sculpture, as it offends the purity of Greek and Roman bronze or marble in their present taste, even though nearly all the ancient sculpture we are accustomed to seeing in terms of these “pure” materials, would have been lavishly painted in their own time.

SPIRIT SPOUSES IN BAULE CULTURE

In Baule culture, spirit spouses are a physical representation of a husband or wife, who is connected to you on a currently existing yet separate spiritual realm. This spouse can cause trouble or bring misfortune into your life. When they do start interfering in your earthly life, a

flattering likeness is commissioned to tame and soothe the otherworldly partner. These figures are carved with immense care and are emblematic of the most refined features prized in Baule aesthetics: an elongated neck, muscular legs ready to work, smooth and intricately cicatrized skin, and an elaborate coiffure. Downcast eyes of the older style communicated a rich and contemplative inner life to complement outward physical beauty, a winning combination that would have been successful at attracting the spirit of the absent spouse.

1 Susan Vogel, email to Risham Majeed, March 3, 2019.



Detail of image on p.24: wristwatch. Photo: Risham Majeed



Detail of image on p. 25: coiffure of the Lehmann's spirit spouse. Photo: Randi Milman-Brown

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