AFRICAN ART SPEAKS

YORUBA

SELECTED FROM THE
ANDRE NITECKI COLLECTION
OF AFRICAN ART
AT SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
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CATALOG PREPARED BY ANDRE NITECKI, DEPARTMENT OF FINE ARTS, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
OBATALA (ORISA-NLA)

OBATALA, the major male ORISA, is credited with the "creation" of man and woman out of clay. He is very powerful and second only to OLORUN the Omnipotent. He protects the cities and is representative of the highest moral standards. The usual representation of OBATALA is as a horseman with a spear. He is often associated with other animals: snakes, leopards and fish.

The worship of OBATALA consists of dancing, prayers and offerings of food.

69.170.570. Horseman
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 24½"

This sample representation of OBATALA, the god of Creation, is a classical Yoruba head that owes its stylistical tradition to the art of Ile of ten centuries ago. The head, void of hair but with a pronounced hairline, and the missing eyebrows are also characteristic of the Ile heads. The head, being the center of African life forces, is overemphasized in standard African proportions. The horse is less important than the human being (or in this case the Deity) and is therefore smaller than the horseman.

69.170.101. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 14"  

This representation of OBATALA from Ile-Ife is known by the Deity synonym ORISA. The figure, with a king's (OBA) crown is seated on a small stool.

69.170.583. Horseman
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 19½"

This figure, although damaged by time and insects represents the African, and especially the Yoruba sense of balance and inner calm and strength: a gentle face, yet very massive; strong body and muscular horse, ready to go, yet self-contained. The horseman wishes to go, he is ready to go; he seems to be waiting for the right time to move.

69.170.471. Horseman
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 12½"

Similar treatment of the same Deity but smaller in size and with different use of color.
69.170.584. Horseman
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 24 1/2”

The striking feature of this horseman is a large hat carved from a separate piece of wood. The hat is of European style of the Colonial period. The figure and the horse are painted with bright imported paints.

69.170.475. Horseman
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 23 1/2”

The main emphasis of this figure is on the face which is delicately carved and of almost feminine quality. The body proportions and the relationship of the rider to the horse are representative of African proportions.

69.170.585. Horseman
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 24 1/2”

Representation of OBATALA with a long spear in his right hand. The horseman is placed on a cylindrical stand intended to be carried during a religious rite. The bearded horseman has a female hair style.
IFA The Oracular Deity

IFA, the oracular deity also belongs to the major ORISA and its worship is widespread throughout the Yoruba country. It is believed that IFA is connected with the God of wisdom, ORUNMILA. There are many objects used in the IFA divination ceremonies. The most important one is a circular tray called OPON IFA and sixteen palm nuts. This tray can sometimes be made in a rectangular shape. Next in importance are elaborate divination trays, usually held on top of human beings: horsemen equipped with spears and staffs and surrounded by wives, slaves, drummers, etc.; a female holding a tray in her outstretched arms. Among other objects are IROKE IFA, beautifully carved bells adorned with a kneeling woman holding her breasts, and brass objects in a variety of forms and patterns.

IFA is asked for guidance and is usually consulted on most important occasions. The priests of IFA are called BABALAWO. The divination is performed by manipulation of the sixteen palm nuts on the divination board or tray. The process is repeated many times and the position of the nuts recorded. The figures recorded are called ODU. There are sixteen major ODU. Each one has subordinate ODU totaling 125. The subordinated ODU have further subdivisions bringing the total to 4,096. Each ODU is represented by a couplet. The chief BABALAWO is supposed to know all the 4,096 ODU.

169.170.369. Tray
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 19¾”

This deeply cut and elaborate IFA Tray called OPON IFA is framed by a circular elevation divided into sixteen pairs, the major part representing a human head. There are six smaller heads in relief and various patterns, mostly geometric. This IFA Tray was used by an Ibadan BABALAWO.

169.170.384. Figure with Bowl
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9¾”

When viewed frontally, this seated female with an infant at the back and holding on her head a divination bowl, forms three horizontal lines made by the ridge of the bowl, the arms and the round base crossed by a vertical line of her head and body. The child is only visible from the side or back view. His body contour is the same as that of the mother. The only difference is the treatment of the child’s head which is turned sideways. The geometry of this piece is striking.

69.170.383. Figures with Bowl
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 7”

Four kneeling females hold on their heads a divination IFA bowl. All women hold their breasts with the palms of their hands.

69.170.112. Bowl with a Goat
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 6¼”

This divination bowl, AJERE IFA was made in ILARO. It represents a goat standing between four pillars supporting a bowl. It was originally painted white.

69.170.170. Bell
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 18½”

A complicated wooden bell, IROKE IFA, which has a kneeling female holding her breasts, placed between the hollow bottom part, the bell itself and the cone-like form on top of her head.

69.170.92. Bell
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 18½”

An IROKE IFA with two kneeling figures, the female being placed above the male. It has a standard bell base and a conical headdress
ESU The Devil

ESU, the Devil, belongs to the major ORISA and is also worshipped throughout Yoruba land. He is represented in many forms. They vary from a very simple stone slab, clay pot or pillar of mud to complex representations of human figures. They are usually naked and kneeling. Female figures often support their breasts with the palms of their hands.

The worship of ESU is based on fear and respect of his immense power. Worship can be in the form of offerings, sacrifices and prayers. The offerings are usually of cowrie shells; and the sacrifice consists of slaughtering of cocks, dogs and goats.

69.170.127, 69.170.128. Kneeling Figures
Nigeria, Yoruba Wood, H. 12”

A pair of male and female devotees of ESU, sometimes referred to as ELEGBARA. ESU devotees are usually characterized by hornlike extensions of their hair. They are often covered with strings of cowrie shells and in most cases are in either kneeling position or are seated on their feet. This pair comes from the Abeokuta area.

69.170.131. Kneeling Male Figure
Nigeria, Yoruba Wood, H. 11”

ESU is a malicious spirit, a practical joker. His shrines are located outdoors, very often outside the village. This Abeokuta figure was made for an outside shrine. He is represented in a classical position: a naked male figure, seated on his feet. His head is pushed by a horn-like extension of hair. More modern ESU are represented by males wearing sun helmets, sun glasses, and wrist watches.

69.170.147. Figure
Nigeria, Yoruba Wood, H. 13½”

This kneeling ESU figure from Ogbomosho was used by an ESU worshipper. The hole in the bottom part was used to string cowry shells. This sculpture is characterized by great elongation of the body and the delicately balanced line and masses of the piece.

69.170.100. Figure
Nigeria, Yoruba Wood, H. 12½”

An ESU figure from Abeokuta representing a kneeling figure with sacrificial container. The eyeballs were marked by iron nails (one still remaining). The hair line is stylized; it remains in an upward position instead of the customarily backward sweeping hairline.

69.170.98. Figure
Nigeria, Yoruba Wood, H. 6½”

A small ESU head placed on a squared base with geometric pattern. This type of treatment is common to the Oyo area.

69.170.159. Figure
Nigeria, Yoruba Wood, H. 17½”

A classical Abeokuta statue of ESU from the Adigbogolo compound. It represents a naked male seated on his feet with the traditional ESU hair style placed in a long horn-like treatment; Hair and beard are stylized. The body proportions correspond to the most common practice of Abeokuta carvers.
OGUN God of Iron

OGUN also is a major ORISA and is particularly important to warriors, hunters and blacksmiths. He is nationally worshipped as a god of Iron and War. OGUN is often represented as a kneeling male with a dog at his feet or as a seated male with a sword. The worship of OGUN is based on sacrifice, in present time a dog, goat or chicken.

69.170.111. Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 13½"  
This figure of OGUN from Ado-Ekiti holding a sword between his legs sits on a round stool. He wears a hat; his head is very large. The total feeling is one of immense intellectual power.

69.170.94. Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 13½"  
Another example of a seated OGUN. He has a stylized beard. Bulky proportions are in keeping with the Abo-Okuta carving tradition.

69.170.138. Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10"  
A figure of a man seated in a high chair from Ilawe. It represents ALUFÀ ABO OGUN and is characterized by a "ready-to-stand-up" position. He seems to have stored energy and is ready to use it at any time.

69.170.586. Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 25½"  
A large male statuette of an OGUN worshipper reminiscent of a Twin figure. It is composed, peaceful yet full of strength and vigor.

69.170.587. Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 24"  
Most common and most standardized representation of OGUN: standing naked male with a sword and a sacrificial dog.
69.170.588. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 24½”
Wooden male figure representing a kneeling Ogun or his worshipper. The figure holds a calabash rattle (ere) in his right hand and leads a sacrificial he-goat in his left. The figure is carved in a dancing procession.

69.170.80. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11½”
This small female figure of a devotee of Ogun is seated on a small stool and supports her breast in the usual Yoruba manner.

69.170.84, 69.170.87. Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 13½”
Female and male worshippers of Ogun in traditional kneeling position. The female is supporting her breast, the source of life and maternal love; the male holds offerings.

69.170.139, 69.170.140. Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11½”
Representation of Ogun and his wife from the Abeokuta carvers. Both figures are designed to be held in the Ogun priests’ hands during the religious rites.

69.170.589. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 23½”
A female worshipper of Ogun with voluminous breasts not uncommon in the Yoruba art.

69.170.590. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 24½”
A kneeling female representing Ogun’s wife or a female worshipper of Ogun. The classical face and classical proportions represent again poetic kindness and the suggestion of inner beauty. To the Yoruba beautiful means “good” and “useful” and thus this female figure represents both qualities.

69.170.571, 69.170.572. Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 24”
Classical representation of Ogun and his wife. The pair is dignified and peaceful. Strength is implied in the position and proportions of the body.

69.170.134, 69.170.135. Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 8”
A kneeling pair, male and female, again representing Ogun and his bride, or a pair of Ogun’s worshippers, from Igbo Ora. Characteristic of this pair is the hair treatment of two bunches. The male holds a rattle (ere), the female holds her breasts.
A pair of Ogun worshippers painted black, white and green from the Abeokuta area. Probably at one time they formed a part of a larger grouping.

Worshippers of Ogun with a female surmounted by a male. Both are in traditional positions.

A kneeling pair of worshippers of Ogun, in traditional positions and classical treatment probably from the Abeokuta area.

A painted male figure, probably a worshipper, from Abeokuta; painted black, yellow and white.

A male worshipper of Ogun in a kneeling position.

An ABO Ogun figure from Ondo. He is represented standing and holding a sword in his right arm.

A male standing figure, possibly a worshipper of Ogun.
SANGO God of Thunder

SANGO, also a major male ORISA, is a god of Lightning and Thunder. He has three wives, OYA, OSUN and OBA.

Representations of SANGO, his devotees or his wives almost always include a SANGO axe or thunder axe which varies in style, size and shape.

The worship of SANGO consists of sacrifice and offerings.

69.170.212. Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 33”

An imposing figure of SANGO, God of Lightning and Thunder from Igho Ora. A seated SANGO is supported by six worshippers, both male and female. He holds two figures on his knees. He wears a necklace, has visible facial scarification and shows his teeth in the EGUNGUN fashion. It is a majestic representation of SANGO.

69.170.166. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 18½”

An interesting representation of OYA, wife of SANGO, from Abeokuta. She is standing and supporting her breasts. She wears a skirt decorated with medicinal pouches. The hair headdress consists of large rabbit like ears which are an example of a stylized SANGO axe, a symbol of Thunder.

69.170.163 Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, 16½”

Again a figure of OYA, also from Abeokuta, but this time kneeling and with a more traditional SANGO axe on her head.

69.170.171. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 6”

Again from Abeokuta, this small figure of kneeling OYA is carved with great care and represents the most maternal instincts of OYA. Her SANGO axe is stylized.

69.170.561. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 14½”

This figure is a classical example of artifacts used in SANGO worship, called OSE SANGO. The bottom part is designed to be held in the hands of a worshipper or a SANGO priest. The SANGO axe follows the established tradition.
69.170.591. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 16¼”

Another classical example of a hand staff with a standing female and a large SANGO axe. The axe has an incised pattern and two holes in the bottom plan for addition of beads or shells. The figure wears an added bronze necklace. She carries twins with her; one in front and one at her back.

69.170.167. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 17”

A SANGO staff. OSE SANGO, with a human head and a simple SANGO axe. This piece was used during a SANGO dance tie in Iwo. The double axe is a standard symbol of the SANGO cult and it is possible that the symbol dates back to the Iron Age.

69.170.174. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9½”

An OSE SANGO from Ogbomos Village near Ibadan is characterized by the great simplicity and near abstraction of the treatment of human form that blends with the thunder axe.

69.170.175. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 20”

A kneeling female ARUGBA SANGO, from Ado Ekiti stands out again as an example of balance of line and masses. This kneeling female is holding in her outstretched arms an intricate tray. The proportions, although stylized, are very pleasing to the eye. There is a great youthful beauty about this figure, emphasized by her deep reverence and piety.
OGBONI SOCIETY

The OGBONI Society or Council is a guild which claims exclusive knowledge of the rituals and ceremonies of the spirit gods of the Yoruba. It exercised, at one time, great political power. It was concerned with preservation of order, it settled disputes and judged and punished offenders. It also acted during the funeral rites of important members of the community.

OGRONI society uses many objects in its rituals and ceremonies. Most of them are made of brass and represent men and women either kneeling or standing.

69.170.151. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Brass, H. 7”

A standing male figure EDAN OGBONI from Usallen used by the OGBONI Society members. It is placed on a long iron spike to allow the piece to be inserted into the ground.

69.170.148. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Brass, H. 4”

A brass representation of Ogun, the God of Iron in the Ado Ekiti style but possibly from Iwo, or even from Gbomawa. A small but very intricate sculptural form of a seated male on tubular stool with a staff in his hand. This elegant miniaturized treatment is common to the OGBONI society.
69.170.350. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Brass, H. 8”

This EDAN IWANA of the OGBONI Society was probably cast in Iwo. It represents a male holding a fan and a medicine pouch seated on a mount. He wears a necklace with leopard teeth attached to it. The delicacy of design and love of details represents another aspect of Yoruba craftsmanship.

69.170.392. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Brass, H. 7”

A naked male figure with a sword in the right hand is one of the pair of bronze (or brass) figures that were held together by the still remaining part of a chain attached to the figure’s hat. Both figures are seated on a rod that was driven into the soil. It is a strong and fierce representation of a spirited force, possibly a representation of Ogun, the god of iron. It was made in Iworwam, near Ibadan.

69.170.149. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Brass, H. 2 1/2”

A bronze casting of a naked male representation of Ogun (IWANA Ogun) from Ijebu’s OGBONI Society. The kneeling figure has large fan-like feet, large hands and large fan-like ears. The hands are not in a symmetrical position. This is not unusual for this type of Yoruba art.
Another pair of ABO OGUN possibly from the same workshop as the previous pair. Although considerably larger this pair retains the same quality as its smaller counterpart. An interesting anachronism is apparent in the head of the female who wears a stylized beard and has eyebrows that are very rare in the Yoruba sculpture. The pieces were made by the cire perdue (lost wax) method.

Another example of ABO OGUN possibly cast around Lagos. They are much simpler and at the same time much more elongated. Both are kneeling females; one is holding a sacrificial bowl, the other is supporting her breasts.

Modern male and female brass figures from Ibadan. Done with great simplicity and even greater conviction. There is greater tendency towards more realistic and anatomically more correct interpretation—but the spirituality is retained by the stylization of the faces and the inner strength retained by the rhythmic repetitions of lines.
The tradition of brass and bronze casting goes back to the classical period of Ife of a millennium ago which is considered today to be one of the finest and most sensitive representations of human form ever achieved by man. The standing male and female ABO OGUN figures have nothing in common with the "humanizers" and "naturalism" of Ife and are cast in "tribal" tradition. They were used or intended to be used in the cult of Ogun, God of Iron and War and patron of hunters, soldiers and blacksmiths.

Four medicine containers representing two males and two females. Males are holding staffs in their right hand, females are supporting their breasts. The heads serve as stoppers.

Two simple three-legged medicine containers with stoppers made in Lagos.

Nigeria. Yoruba Brass, H. 2%-%10"
IBEJI

IBEJI is a minor ORISA who protects the twins, who are treated with kindness, and in some areas considered as messengers of the ORISA. On the death of one or both twins, a small wooden statue called ERE IBEJI is carved as a substitute for the dead child. The figure is always in an erect position, arms following the line of the body and is placed on a round base. The worship of the IBEJI consists mostly of "taking care" of the wooden statues. They are washed, rubbed, fed and dressed the same way the living child would be treated.

69.170.333, 69.170.334. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11½"

This pair from Abeokuta is distinguished by its exaggerated body proportions. The head is almost as large as the rest of the body: head 5 inches, body 4 inches, legs 1½ inches and the base ½ inch. Therefore these are exaggerated beyond the usual "African proportions" which IBEJI have in common with much African art. Body tattooing is evenly distributed on the upper part of the back and bottom part of the front of the body. The arms extend all the way to the feet. Stylized ears follow the line of the chin. The hair ends in a vertical half-disc effect. The body rests on its feet without noticeable legs.

69.170.312. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9½"

This less stylized example of an Abeokuta twin exemplifies a more modern approach. The body proportions are more realistic and the figure wears shorts. Carved clothing appears only on very recent pieces, especially those made for the tourist trade.

69.170.294. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 7½"

A smaller than average example of a female twin is dressed in a short skirt. This figure was decorated with beads and elaborate earrings. The hair style is modern as are the general composition and proportions of the body.
69.170.102, 69.170.103. Twin Figures  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10⅓”

Recent examples of carving which retain, however, the traditional Yoruba balance of line and mass with careful coordination of ears, chin and breasts.

69.170.247, 69.170.248. Twin Figures  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 8”

The reason for inclusion of this pair of male IBEJ in the collection is to illustrate the unusual treatment of the feet. Instead of the usual flat feet resting upon a disc-shaped round pedestal, the feet wear shoes with high heels and there is no stand. A recent piece of carving, probably about 1960, from the Ibe area.

69.170.197. Twin Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9⅖”

This exquisite little female statue probably comes from the village of Etsu and was carved with great love and patience. The body proportions depart from the more rigid pattern of IBEJ carvings and in themselves would qualify for no more than a good example of this type of treatment. The head, however, is so strikingly beautiful that it catches the viewer’s attention and requires him to contemplate the delicacy of execution and the mastery of technique. The face is basically a typical twin face; it has elaborate hair style, stylized ears, protruding eyes, flattened nose, large lips and characterized facial scarifications. It is the harmony and relationship of these formal elements together with the strength of the decisive stroke of a carver’s knife that created this masterpiece.

69.170.249. Twin Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 8”

Ibodore, the most populous Yoruba town from the nineteenth century almost until the present times, attracted many carvers from all parts of the vast Yoruba territory. The styles of the IBEJ carvings are as varied as all the kingdoms of the Yoruba. The sizes, proportions, treatments of the body, expressions of the face and modes of the hair all represent the great individuality of their creators. Also, as could be expected, there are many counter influences, cross-fertilizations, adaptations and adoptions of manners and techniques. This small female twin figure with its carefully drawn face is reminiscent of an Abeokuta style.

69.170.282. Twin Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10⅓”

Another female twin statue that borrows from Shaki stylistical tradition. The facial characteristics owe their spiritual ancestry to the northwestern part of Yoruba land.

69.170.340. Twin Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10”

This classical male figure with its face washed and rubbed away creates a strangely absent feeling and yet it is very much a part of the living.

69.170.332. Twin Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10⅔”

This is an unusual little male statue. The body, unlike most of the twin carvings, suggests a young, almost boyish figure. It is also bent forward as if it were in movement or ready to address the audience. It is rather massive and strong and yet, due to the bending of the body and its high gloss together with the strength and mass of the legs, it remains delicate and innocent.
The genius of an artist manifests itself best when it can and does achieve great individuality within the framework of strict convention. The Yoruba cult of the IBEJI demands great rigidity from the carver: he must create a static figure or two identical figures, conforming without any deviation as to the body proportions, position of all parts of the body and even the size of the carving. At the same time the carving must be, without a shadow of a doubt, an IBEJI. The finished object is a language, no less than a spoken word—and the carver is allowed only to say ERE IBEJI.

The Ibadan artist who created these two male IBEJI said just that: ERE IBEJI; but he said it with great force, conviction and dedication. His words expressed the Yoruba rhythm. Yoruba sense of beauty and the Yoruba love of human life. The figures are alive, pulsating with inner energy and ready to take part in the great cycle of life.

A female twin figure with an unusually large head and an almost non-existent neck. The body has a reddish hue, the face is of natural wood and the hair retains traces of indigo blue coloring.

This female twin figure has a very narrow head and a somewhat pear-shaped jaw. The larger jaw is well balanced by the protruding eyebrows. The ears are composed of two parallel triangular forms and the heavy facial scarification is matched by the incised hair style.

This slim and gentle female twin is in the Ogbono tradition. The facial features are partially worn away. The figure's balance is achieved by moderate-sized breasts matched by moderate legs. The total effect is one of quiet and gentle balance.

This male figure with a deeply scarified head resting on a very short neck has a simplified body. This striking contrast between the head and body treatment is the most constant characteristic of West African aesthetics. The human head is very often overemphasized while the rest of the body is placed in a secondary position.

A proud male twin who stands very erect on short legs, has strongly attached hands and a long neck. The coloring of the neck was caused by beads (now missing). This figure has unusually pronounced lips.

An unusual aspect of this elongated male twin figure is the open mouth and the visible teeth. IBEJI figures almost always have closed lips as do most other Yoruba figures including their masks. The only notable exceptions are the EGUNGUN masks (especially those from the Abeokuta area) and a few of the female figures from the Ondo area.

This gentle male figure incorporates many sculptural devices that create an elegantly peaceful yet decisively strong effect. The eyes are large and composed of two parts; one half represents an eyelid and the other the eye itself. Originally there were nails to represent the pupils. The nose and lips are pronounced and the oversized ear points toward the chin and is accentuated by incised tribal markings. The shoulders are rounded and the body elongated. Four of the fingers are very long and narrow; the fifth finger, short and heavy accentuates the abdominal line. The legs are short and end in large flat feet. The circular stand is thin. Total effect is one of careful balance of line and mass.
69.170.353. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9"

This male figure suggests a young body with its narrow shoulders and small hands. Pubic hair is shown in relief. There are two carved bracelets on each arm.

69.170.339. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11½"

This somewhat grotesque male figure departs from the established tradition by being placed on bended knees. Most IBEJI figures stand on short, strong, straight legs. This example, however, bends his legs twice; once at the knee and for the second time at the ankle. If the legs were treated in the standard way the figure would be much too tall to be accepted by most Yoruba mothers of twins.

69.170.331. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10"

A female twin IBEJI with a carefully outlined curvature. When viewed from the side the arms extend into the pointed breasts and are balanced by the curved line of the leg which extends into the pointed buttocks. The round stand also curves instead of being a flat disc. The head is treated in the traditional manner.

69.170.351. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10½"

When viewed from the side this bulky female twin suggests a pregnant woman. Large breasts cover half of the body like a heavy blanket. This is balanced by small protruding buttocks. The head is highly stylized with a somewhat surprised expression. The hands and hips blend and form a flat surface.

69.170.352. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10½"

A grotesque male figure probably made for non-Yoruba consumption yet very consistent in its sculptural solutions. A small head with large eyes sits on a strong neck; large shoulders end in short arms. The legs are long and straight. The hands wrap themselves over the hips and the feet wrap themselves over the stand thus achieving balance.
69.170.329. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10"  
A standard presentation of a male twin with a forward jutting chin and a hair style which is extended in the back. The body proportions are traditional.

69.170.256. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 8½"  
A male figure with very irregular lines has very deeply cut facial scarification. The hair and nose lines are interrupted by a deep tribal mark. This figure with its air of ferociousness departs from the traditional gentleness of the Yoruba carvings.

69.170.281. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11¼"  
This is a very top-heavy female figure. The large and strongly incised head with almost no forehead sits on a long and simply treated body with straight breasts. This illustrates again the Yoruba emphasis on the head over the rest of the body.

69.170.285. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11½"  
Although this female twin figure also has a strongly treated face, it is less top-heavy than the previous twin because of the roundness of the head. There is a greater elongation of the body and arms and a shortening of the legs. The legs stand apart giving the figure more stability.

69.170.114, 69.170.115. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 12"  
A male and female pair of twins probably carved separately. Small but noticeable differences are evident in the hair treatment, size of the ears, forehead and in the body scarification. The female's arms are also carved with greater detail although free of scarification. This is probably the most massive example of the IBEJ.
This pair of male IBUI figures has exceptional hair treatment. Instead of elaborate upward hairstyles, they either wear caps or have a very flat hair dress. The proportion of the head to the rest of the body is more naturalistic, although the legs remain short and strong. Both figures have a bracelet on their left arm. Their total feeling is light and cheerful.

69.170.239, 69.170.240. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 8½”

It is only fitting that Ife, the great spiritual center of the Yoruba nation and the home of the great life terra cotta and bronzes of the ninth to twelfth century be represented by this majestic female twin. She is calm, confident and regal. The elegant hair style, precise lines of the facial elements, square shoulders and rounded breasts all add to a quiet dignity and unquestionable pride in a great tradition.

69.170.245, 69.170.250. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11½”

A male-female pair of twins which show unusual differences in hair treatment. The female has a rounded style of hair dress which has been flattened on the top while the male’s is a traditional side flattened and somicircular hair dress. The female’s breasts are unusually small. Body proportions remain classical.

69.170.292, 69.170.293. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10”

A strong and massive pair of male twins with classical proportions and traditional treatment. The body is softened by a definite rounding of the chest extending into the line of the arms. A straight back ends in short legs set apart. In spite of the strength of the piece, the effect is one of peacefulness and calm.

69.170.327, 69.170.328. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 8½”

Very similar in treatment to the previous pair, this set of twins is smaller. They have been used longer and the facial features are less clear. The characteristic treatment of the chest and its circular continuation into the line of the arms suggests the same carver or at least the same “tradition” of carving.

69.170.186, 69.170.187. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10½”

This pair of male IBUI is more delicate and lighter than the previous two pairs. The heads are narrower; the chest-arm line less sharply defined. The legs are farther apart and details of the fingers and toes more evident. It is the most elegant of the three pairs illustrated.
69.170.144, 69.170.145. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10 1/2"  
Two female twins carved at life, the cultural and spiritual center of the Yoruba. The eyes originally had a pupil in the center of each to indicate the pupil. One nail still remains, the others are missing. The necks are incised to hold beads. Figures were covered with camwood powder.

69.170.241, 69.170.242. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9"  
ILA-ORANGUN is represented by a male and female set of twins. They are obviously carved by the same artist but not necessarily at the same time. The male figure is a series of cylindrical forms interrupted by vertical shoulders and hips. The female appears to be heavier with more solid hips and arms and more rounded shoulders.

69.170.555, 69.170.556. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10 1/2"  
A pair of male-female twin figures carved by the same carver but for two different occasions. The female is a little taller, slimmer and more feminine. The male is more triangular with shorter legs, more solid feet and a heavier face. Both figures were at one time completely covered with camwood substance. The faces were washed and rubbed and the features began to disappear. Both figures represent the finest style in the classical tradition.

69.170.557. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11"

From the same tradition (family) as the two previous figures, this male twin is smaller, tall and elegant. The arms are narrower than most due to heavy metal bracelets that rubbed away part of the arms.

69.170.152, 69.170.153. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11 1/2"  
The heads of this pair of male twins are slightly larger than the rest of the bodies. Foreheads, noses, religious amulets and the trunks of the bodies are shaped in triangular forms. Triangular forms are also evident in the top of the hair, in the stylization of the ear and the position of the legs.

69.170.154. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 12"

A single male IBEJI probably carved by the same carver as the previous pair shows the same triangular tendencies. Instead of an incised hair style, this figure wears a cap with three triangular patterns at the back.
Again from the same carver, this pair of female twins introduces additional triangles into the borders of the chest amulets and the bottom part of the abdomen. Like the three previous figures, the oversized round eyes, prominent vertical lips, and the horizontal hair style soften the geometrical pattern.

The top part of the head of this figure was destroyed by termites and subsequently rebuilt with wood and clay and painted with indigo. The nose was originally more pronounced but is now flattened by use (waxing and rubbing). The shape of the chin is repeated in the breasts. The side view suggests that the figure is leaning forward; this is balanced by the extension of the thumb.

This double pair of twins (male and female) is characteristic of current carving practices produced exclusively for foreign consumption. The body proportions, except for the legs, depart from the traditional treatment. The quality of workmanship also differs from the Yoruba accepted conventions.

This female twin figure is of great sculptural complexity incorporating numerous Yoruba stylistic inventions. The face is delicately drawn with tribal scarifications, well outlined nose, eyes with a noticeable triangular upper border and basic pupils and highly stylized ears. The rather massive head with its elegantly elaborate hairstyle creates a total feeling of gentleness, prosperity and mature beauty. Gently carved arms end in very elongated fingers which add to the feeling of well-being and elegance. There are traces of blue indigo paint remaining on the hair.
69.170.276. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10”

Carved by the same sculptor as the preceding piece, this female figure has the face much more worn through ritual use. The eye borders, the nose, tribal scarification and the lips are partially rubbed off. This together with the fine patina gives the figure a very gentle feeling.

69.170.161, 69.170.162. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9”

These female twins, stylistically unrelated to the two preceding figures have had their bodies painted with red pigment, their hair with indigo paint and the faces left in the natural color of the wood. The breasts, stomachs, backs and hair are imaginatively incised.

69.170.199, 69.170.200. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9½”

This strongly angular pair of female figures is softened by the hands which wrap themselves around the hips creating an oval shape in contrast to the squareness of the shoulders. The line of the top of the hair accentuates the shoulders. This vertical-horizontal pattern is repeated in the facial scarification.

69.170.302, 69.170.303. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9”

The idiosyncratic treatment of the body of this female pair solves again one of the most ambitious sculptural undertakings, namely; the placing of a youthful, happy, proud and slightly elevated face on a massive, middle aged and prosperous body. It incorporates physical beauty with symbols of material accomplishments. The overy massive legs and hips and strongly protruding breasts accentuated by their round framing are balanced by an oval head on an elongated neck.
69.170.295. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9½”

This female twin figure comes from the same “school” of carvers as the two preceding figures. The hips are less exaggerated. The scarification on the breasts and on part of the face is in relief. It is a quieter and more subdued presentation than in the preceding figures.

69.170.163. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 8”

A comparatively small, excellent example of a female IBEJi is illustrated by this finely finished carving. It is characterized by a very smooth patina and gentle proportions. The carver has achieved an overall pleasing effect.

69.170.313, 69.170.314. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10½”

This seemingly simple pair of male twins summarizes Yoruba aesthetic principles and practices: kindness and gentleness indicated by the soft curvature of the body, especially in the arms and hips; strength symbolized by the extension of the feet and general proportions of the human figure; humility by the pose, position of the arms and hands; and finally the quiet contemplation emanating from the inner strength of the piece. This self-contained composition and the proportions of line and masses illustrate the classical approach of the Ogbonosho masters.

69.170.317. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, 10½”

This male statue was probably carved by the same carver as the preceding pair. The head is larger, the feet smaller and the shoulders are squared off. The remaining traces of facial scarification are the same. The line of the ear continues into the lower part of the chin and the parting of the hair also continues into the scarification. A good Yoruba carving is always characterized by careful continuation of lines. The Yoruba artist rarely allows the eye of the viewer to jump from one area to another thus creating a very gentle and peaceful effect.

69.170.269. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10½”

This female twin should be seen both from a front position and from a side position to be fully appreciated. From the frontal position it is striking because of the cavity created among the blades of the shoulders and the lower-than-usual position of the breasts, as well as the roundness of the head. From the side view it appears like a different person altogether. The legs appear much longer, the body and the stomach seem to be one unit, the breasts seem smaller, the neck longer and the face seems elongated. This figure seems to negate the theory that IBEJi statues have been created to be viewed in their frontal position only.

69.170.300. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10½”

This is a male figure of a twin of great calm and quiet composition. A fairly small head sitting on gently sloping shoulders, arms ending in definite and large hands that blend with the thighs make up the basic elements of this statue. Not one body element stands out in any specific way thus creating an unobtrusive image of an average man.

69.170.110. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9½”

This male twin figure has a traditional cup in place of the usual elevated hair style. The original nails still remain in the eyes. The facial expression is more somber than usual possibly suggesting portraiture. This makes it very unusual as IBEJi figures are almost always stylized and no real attempt is ever made to portray an individual nor are any suggestions given of age. Anatomical accuracy is of no concern to the artist. The statue represents an idea not a human being.

69.170.348. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9”

A single male twin with a smaller than average head and more realistic body proportions. The nose is treated with greater imagination and the nasal orifices extend across the whole lower part of the face.
This male figure departs stylistically from the other Ogbomosho pieces. The head is much rounder and is composed of a number of circles, semicircles and triangles. The total effect is that of expectation, mystery and spirituality.

The altogether different approach of this pair of male twins illustrates the rich imagination of the Yoruba carver despite the strict limitations imposed upon him by rigid tradition and the demands of his consumers. The head is large and strongly defined and sits erectly on a narrow neck. It has triangular eyes set in semicircular sockets, parallel lips and the hair is vertically incised. The shoulders are squared and a triangular amulet hangs on the chest. Semicircular muscles point to the very narrow waist, this in turn extends into round and prominent hips. The basically monumental sculptural form still remains light and dynamic.

These twins, male and female, are very massive and are in the Ogbomosho tradition. Standard Yoruba proportions are used. The hair is painted with indigo and the body was covered with camwood powder.

This male figure is carved by the same carver from Ondo. By changing the body proportions (larger head and a flatter treatment of the hair) a figure which is basically similar to the previous twin and is the same size appears to the eye to be considerably smaller and lighter. The head is painted blue.

The town of Oyo which was the capital of the Oyo military kingdom is a center of attraction to many foreign visitors. It is rich in tradition and attracts artisans and craftsmen. Calabash carving, leather industry and the palace of the Alafin of Oyo add to the attraction of this important community located on the main route to the north of Nigeria.

The five twin figures from Oyo represent the most contemporary approach to wood carving. They are executed with great speed and many traditional features are left unfinished. The proportions depart from long established conventions, the workmanship seems to be very inferior. The figures illustrate the end of tradition caused by unreasonable and unintelligent demands made by the tourist trade. Purchase of such pieces should be avoided.
69.170.254. Twin Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11”

The area of Shaki, located in the northwestern part of Yoruba land, shelters many traditional carvers. Each is distinguished by great individuality and a profound sense of integrity. This male twin figure illustrates the sensitive balance of form and line. The extended curvature of various parts of the body is reflected in the indentations of the arms. The chest line is balanced by the lines of the abdomen.

69.170.250, 69.170.251. Twin Figures  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10”

This male-female pair of IBEJI illustrates the typical life sequence of the statues in their ritual treatment. The heads were constantly washed and anointed and began to lose their carefully detailed facial features while the bodies were protected and thus retained their original design. The attractive use of arches, broken by the small breasts on the female figure, with the vertical elongation of the hair gives the pieces an expression of dignity and calm.

69.170.275. Twin Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9”

A female figure, possibly from the same carver, is distinguished by the slight parting of the legs and the somewhat forward position of the body. It possesses characteristics that give it an affinity to the art of the Indians of North America.

69.170.283. Twin Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10”

This female figure of a twin represents a great departure from the stereotype representation. It is a very "open" type of sculpture creating larger than usual "open" spaces between masses. The legs are set very far apart; the arms, due to their narrowness, appear also to be far apart. The head is smaller than usual and rests on a long and narrow neck. The headdress is also not given the traditional treatment. It is comparatively short and ends in a moderate elevation. The trunk of the body is barrel-shaped.
This self-contained male and female pair represents the traditional mainstream of the Yoruba (Ife). The proportions of the body, details of the facial features, patina of the wood and the total feeling of the sculpture could have been produced under the influence of any great Yoruba artist. (Permanently housed at St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York)

This male pair of statues carries further all the characteristics of the Yoruba artist. The most striking feature is the exactness with which each figure is made. The abdominal scarification is arranged in seven horizontal units. They consist of six and seven triangular motifs on one figure which repeat themselves with mirror-like precision on the other twin. The incised lines of the hair are identical in both cases. An almost microscopic examination is necessary to distinguish the two figures.

This male statue from an unidentified location is characterized by the striking treatment of the head and the shape of the head in relation to the rest of the body. It has a rather round head with an elaborate crown-like hair style. The head rests on a short neck which ends in squared off shoulders. The head would have been far too heavy for the figure if it were not for its being balanced by the arms that form a round space almost identical to the size of the head. The trunk of the body is too small to interfere with the required effect. The short legs and the shape of the genitals balance the elaborate hairstyle. This figure pays tribute to the carver’s intuition and his great skill in solving difficult sculptural propositions.
69.170.3. Twin Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 12".

A male twin figure, full of contradictions and unsolved problems, has been created by an unorthodox carver. It departs in so many ways from the traditional treatment that one is tempted to doubt the Yoruba origin of the carver. First of all the body has unusual scarification not seen or remembered by any of the Yoruba consulted by the author. It also has a strangely elongated head and most peculiar positioning of the hands that are held on the stomach rather than placed alongside the body or legs. In spite of all this it is unquestionably an authentic piece. Not one of many Yoruba cult members consulted doubted its authenticity or questioned its use.

69.170.380, 69.170.581. Twin Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11¼".

The well preserved bodies of these two male twin figures are not enough to accurately identify their origin. The features of the heads are rubbed off by washing and rubbing, leaving us with insufficient data for documentation. Fortunately we have the two objects that can delight us with their mere presence and make us forget our lack of knowledge. The pleasing effect is the gift of the carver and of the Yoruba mother who by her love of her two dead sons left for us this testimony to one of the most poetic religious cults. We have two delicate bodies, with traditional Yoruba proportions and relationships of limbs and masses crowned with heads that are gentle and at the same time full of mystery and spiritualism. The cavities left by now missing nails, that were at one time the eyeballs of the figures, suggest only too strongly that the figures can see. But what they can see does not belong to the material world of the bodies with their bracelets and beads, but to the world of the ORISHA and through it to the eternal life of the human soul.
69.170.280. Twin Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10½”

This is also a very gentle example of a classical female twin figure with a "worn out" face and an intricate hair style. The lips were originally very full. The ears were pierced to hold earrings which are now missing. This figure has small breasts and pubic hair, which is very unusual.

69.170.362. Twin Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10”

Very little is left of the facial features on this male twin figure. Of great interest is the hair style composed of four vertical "buns" surrounding an inner core.

69.170.271. Twin Figure  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9½”

A female figure of a twin with an unusual nose treatment. The bridge of the nose is an integral part of the face and has carved nostrils. The ears of this figure are placed very low and extended backwards like two butterflies. The long arms and the hands with elongated fingers reach almost to the ground.
Representations of other ORISAS and their worshippers

69.170.367. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 27”

This statue represents OBA ORISA from Ila Orangun. The figure is seated on a high chair and is holding a rooster and a bowl. It has an elaborate headdress.

69.170.223. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 26”

An unusual representation of ORISA ALA standing on the left foot, from Ekiti area. The right arm is bent to correspond to the movement of the right leg. The figure wears a wrist watch and a hat.

69.170.213. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 37”

This is a very unusual representation of ORISA ALA from Igangan. The figure represents a kneeling woman with an “offering tray” and a child on her back. The figure is placed over an elephant. This piece is assumed to come from the shrine of H.H. the Asigangan of Igangan (the natural ruler of Igangan in the Oyo Division) where it was used in the worship by the Oloyos. The bottom elephant is likely of later addition, as would be indicated by the difference of style between it and the female statue. It is a noble piece full of piety and reverence.

69.170.372. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 39”

A very impressive and monumental representation of OLUFAN, connected with the cult of SANGO. It represents a mother with twins, one in front and one at the back, with heads turned sideways. There are two small openings in front that would indicate that the piece was worn by a dancer on his shoulders during a religious rite. The piece is painted with blue dots. This piece, called IFE MODAKEKE is from Ibadan.
Two figures of ORISA EFUN from Ado Ekiti. One figure is kneeling and is holding a sacrificial calabash in front of her and a child on her back. The other female figure is standing. They were both carved by the same artist and retain exactly the same body proportions. Both wear white skirts and have scarified breasts. The only difference is in the hair treatment. Both figures are distinguished by elegant stylization typical to the Ado Ekiti tradition.

A long staff used in religious ceremonies depicting two women and one man above each other and separated by rectangular mirrors. On the top stands a man and a woman. Both men have an opening in their mouth. Facial scarification varies. There is a feeling of rigid rhythm and intense solemnity about this piece.

Statue of pregnant woman from Ibeju representing a mother of twins, IYA IBEJI. It is reminiscent of the standard treatment of the twin figures. The figure is in an erect position; carved to be seen frontally and is placed on a round disc. The arms, however, unlike the twins, adhere to the body and do not have a space in between.

A simple standing statue of OSANYIN from Iseyin area. The very large head is in the classical Yoruba tradition.

Another presentation of OSANYIN but from a different area and in a different position. This figure is seated on his feet and was used in two.

A delicate female statue of ORISA OBIRIN from Ilaro. Characteristic is the line of the shoulders, arms and legs that frame the body in an oval pattern.

A different approach to the representation of ORISA OBIRIN. Also from Ilaro. Although the arms and legs follow the same pattern the figure lacks the lightness of the previous example.

Two Idere statues representing a man and a woman smoking pipes. The pieces are presumed to be from the region of His Highness the Onidire of Idere (King of Idere) and were in the Ilapara West compound, and were once owned by the Ako of Idere. Both figures have human faces tattooed on their chests, are both bearded and have a diadem on their back. There is great stability and peace about them; at the same time they represent a majestic and powerful expression of religious devotion.

Standing male of unknown religious function. He is beautifully carved and could be used to represent the classical Yoruba approach to the treatment of the human body: large head, arms, genitals and feet; body treated simply with little attention paid to the anatomical correctness. It represents what one "knows" and "feels" about a man rather than what one sees.

Small human heads of unknown religious function representing a female and two males, one fighting a snake around his neck and head.
69.170.95. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 13½”

A kneeling female worshipper with twins on either side of her. She has an elaborate hair style and great attention is paid to the details of her face.

69.170.93. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 14½”

A kneeling female worshipper, with one child at her back, holds her large breasts in front of her.

69.170.466 Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 21”

Another kneeling worshipper, possibly for Ado Ekiti, with a baby on her back and a sacrificial bowl in front of her.

69.170.478. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 22½”

A colorful representation of a female worshipper from Ibadan holding a large rooster in front of her. It is cheerful, happy and yet shows some signs of piety.

69.170.470. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 17½”

A well-balanced statue of a female worshipper, who is seated on her feet and is holding a large delicately carved container on her head. It is well-balanced and seems to reveal a woman of great beauty.

69.170.669. Container
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 12”

An elaborate wooden container with a bird and geometrical pattern on the lid.

69.170.621. Spoon
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 22”

A wooden spoon with a figure of a female worshipper on the handle.

69.170.85. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 16”

A simple staff with a human head. It has some analogies to an ESU representation but it is unlikely that it was made for the ESU cult. It is of striking simplicity.
A statue of a hunter with a rifle and a gun from Ado Ekiti. In contrast to the previous piece this statue represents a man who is ready to hunt: it is strong, young and vigorous.

Two female figures with characteristic facial features: whitened eyeballs, hair style, body proportions, etc. They are placed on a rectangular base and there is a decorative ball-like object on the side. This probably was part of a verandah decoration.

A statue of an old man Baba Anuibo from Lalugon. The man has short legs and virtually no neck and does create a feeling of a tired old man.

A statue of a young woman from Ilaro. It is carved in the tradition similar to the treatment of Yoruba twins (BEJI). The exact use is unknown.

A statue of a woman from Oyo, made for decorative purpose only.

A figure of a naked male from Oyo, at one time forming a part of an erotic group.

A statue of two boys from Abeokuta. The figure represents a dance but the figures seem to be more concerned with an effect they create on the viewer than with the dance itself.
69.170.146. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10’

A figure of a drummer boy playing a bata drum from Agoshasha near Igbio Ora. It is a cheerful and happy presentation. The boy has one foot raised. Most Yoruba carvings are standing in a frontal position and there is usually little suggestion of motion.

69.170.136. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 7½’

A small wooden doll Agbili from Iseyin. This carving was made for a young girl to play with.

69.170.476. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 23’

A figure of a mother carrying a child on her back. Appears to have no religious function.

69.170.480. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 16’

A figure of a mother holding a child at her back. Although this piece is partly damaged by the climatic conditions of the tropics, it is still of great interest. A good Yoruba carver must balance all the formal elements of a carving; the eye must never wander in a chaotic manner. In this piece the balance is achieved by symmetry and by the continuation of all the lines and by the proportions of the masses. Thus the hairline sweeps gently and the line continues in the clothing that drapes the shoulders. Almost every line and its relationship to other lines or masses is well calculated to create great harmony.

69.170.631. Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 23½’

A statue of a mother with two boys at her side and a small child at her breasts. Mother’s mouth is opened and shows teeth. This is very rare in the figures representing mothers.
Twins are common among the Yoruba.

A statue of a chief wearing a traditional wrapper, royal beads and an elaborate head cover. In one hand he holds a sign Oluwọ, (the traditional title of the natural ruler of two), and in the other hand a staff of office. On both sides of him there are two assistants. They are half his size. This is a traditional way to represent less important people by a reduced dimension.

A beautifully carved bird, Are Akutu. Place of origin not known. It represents a royal peacock.

Another representation of a bird. It stands on long legs and has an extended neck.

A seated monkey from Osiefe Village near Abeokuta. Use of this somewhat erotic piece is not known.
69.170.141. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9"
Another representation of a monkey eating corn. The head is covered with real (monkey's) hair. This piece is from Abeokuta and possibly carved for the same purpose as the previous piece.

69.170.169. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11"
This dog was reputed to come from Iwo but it is more likely to be from Iseyin.

Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10½" - 11½"
A series of small figures, all carved by the same artist in a variety of poses. Possibly they were part of a large mask or a composite sculpture.

69.170.231, 69.170.232. Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10½" - 11½"
A statue of a man and a woman from Ijebu, possibly also forming a part of a larger object (mask or a group treatment). One figure has its hands raised upwards—a rare treatment in the Yoruba style.

69.170.237, 69.170.238. Figures
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 3"
Two small birds from Ado Ekiti. Possibly they were a part of an Epa mask.

69.170.172. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 16"
An unusual statue of a female with pronounced teeth, protruding breasts and standing on high feet that suggest large sandals.

69.170.443. Figure
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 22½"
A standing male with crossed arms. It was very likely designed to be used as a purely decorative piece.

69.170.349. Drum
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 23½"
A massive drum from Osu-Ekiti called Chegbeegumegbe in the form of a kneeling man. Probably used in a Yam festival.

69.170.371. Drum
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 33"
Another Chegbeegumegbe drum from Ibadan. It is much higher and more elongated than the previous one.
AFRICAN MASKS

Any discussion of African masks must start with an answer to the question: "What is an African mask?" A definition would simply read: "A mask is a cover for the face designed to disguise the wearer. A mask worn vertically on the face is usually called a face mask; a mask worn horizontally on the top of the head is usually referred to as a helmet mask." This answer, however, distorts completely the true meaning of the African mask.

The mask must never be divorced from the masque, an allegorical, religious, social and dramatic performance in which a mask plays but a small role. Thus an oversimplified approach dehumanizes and mutilates the total concept of the masque. The mask taken out of its natural and integral context appears static, abstract and irrespective of its technical and aesthetic perfection seems cold, detached and lifeless. The mask's multiple functions and significances must be analyzed. An attempt should be made to understand it in its total significance.

Fundamentally, the mask supports temporarily various spiritual forces and their activities. These forces are invisible to the human eye and are never confined to a physical body, but have a separate existence of their own. At best, therefore, the mask is only a focus in a framework of a ritual. The mask, together with the costume of the bearer or dancer allows itself to be possessed by a spiritual force that takes possession of it and makes it speak, dance, jump, leap, etc. During the ritualistic performance the act performed and everything connected with it is sacred: the mask, the bearer, the drums and the ground on which it is being performed. With great intensity of force the spirit takes possession of the ritual and of the bearer and thus his return from that ritual can be dangerous. After the rite, when spiritual forces evoked by the dancer leave the ceremony, the mask as a representative of those forces then ceases to exist—it then becomes a piece of wood, sometimes of so little importance that it is discarded.

From the above brief observation, it becomes clear that the mask is never a personification of a spirit; only an individual expression of its likeness. Nor is the bearer of the mask representing the spirit but it is the spirit who becomes temporarily visible through the mask using the mask as its vehicle. The mask represents neither a human nor an animal face but creates for the short duration of the rite the most expressive medium through which the spirit can manifest itself. Thus it must be more powerful than either man or animal. The mask is therefore never an idol; only an object of the total ritual.

The appearance of the masque is usually announced by drums that are often reserved for that purpose only. The members of the attending group, depending on the function and significance of the ritual, may vary from a very limited number of "initiated" to the total population of the community. At the summons they gather at a prescribed place. The bearer, usually completely covered, emerges from a "mask hut." The participants react at once and the ritual begins. Special drums, special forms of dance, special sounds from the bearers, special companions and above all the special mask—all join to make a supreme expression of the people's faith in the ever present, ever powerful spiritual force.

The spiritual force evoked during the ceremony can address itself to many problems. Thus it can take upon itself many functions. It can pass judgment, proclaim a sentence, execute the punishment, initiate and administer the rites of circumcision, increase human or agricultural fertility; in other words, perform any function that the welfare of an individual or a community might require.

The mask is, in most cases, commissioned by a priest or an elder who is in charge of the ritual or ceremony. The form is strictly prescribed by the community that requires the mask. The most effective forms are retained and used for generations. The style is usually dictated by the individual way of life and philosophy of the carver and of the tribe. Simplification, abstraction, augmentation is shared by the total community, not unlike a verbal language. The style created within the framework of this understanding is thus full of significance and meaningful to that community.

The size of the mask varies from area to area and within the same area from function to function. Some are very small, not even large enough to cover the face and some are extremely large extending many feet in height. The surface treatment also varies from function to function. The desired finish of the wood can be achieved by dyeing, coloring, application of camwood powder, earth, sacrificial blood, palm oil or gum. Coloring was traditionally derived from earth or vegetable pigments but in recent times imported coloring is sometimes used. Traditional colors are red, white, black and indigo blue with their subtle variations.
GELEDE

GELEDE NTE, like that of FAGUNGUN, is a cult which links the living members of the family with the ancestors. Unlike the FAGUNGUN, the GELEDE spirit appears only on festive occasions and is not associated with funeral rites.

The GELEDE is always carefully dressed in a clean, well-fitted outfit. It often represents a mature woman with well-developed breasts. It wears a mask that belongs to the finest types of Yoruba masks. The appearance of the mask is always gentle, peaceful, and kind. It is never intended to frighten the viewer. The Yoruba consider it to be the most “exquisite” mask and it is carved with more than usual care.

The bearer performs a rhythmical and gentle dance.

69.170.109. Mask, Gelede
Nigeria, Yoruba Wood, H. 7 1/2”

“GELEDE ELEIYE ATI ERARKO”—Bird and animal mask of the GELEDE society from Igbo Ora represents a human head surmounted by an intricate superstructure. On the top of the head stands a ram with a cock on each side surrounded by intertwined forms including guns, swords and a warrior’s pouch. The head is fully protected by the superstructure and is attached to it in two places at the back of the head. This impressive and complicated design is masterfully executed in one piece of wood. There is a strong suggestion of inner strength not easily disturbed by outside forces. It is an example of an open type of sculptural form but has a traditional rain forest approach which focuses the attention on the central core of the object. The eyes and nostrils are pierced as if to allow the bearer to see and breathe. The full effect of the mask can only be appreciated in motion, during the ritual of the masque.

69.170.211. Mask, Gelede
Nigeria, Yoruba Wood, H. 11”

This mask consists of a sensitive and delicate human head surmounted by a band one and a half inches in width and one inch thick with a diameter of ten inches. The wooden band is attached to the head in only one place. The eyes and nostrils are pierced. The head, outside of the band, is void of any decoration. The great simplicity of this mask (in contrast to the previous mask) creates the feeling of inner peace and calmness. It is self-contained and holds its invisible point of gravity in the center of the head. This GELEDE mask appears to have originated in the Tapa region.
69.170.38. Mask, Gelede  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 12½”

Another example of a GELEDE mask, this one has a wooden band surrounding a human head. The band is joined to the head in three places. The head is painted red, indigo blue and white. The eyes and nostrils are pierced. Place of origin has not been identified.

69.170.194. Mask, Gelede  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 12”

This GELEDE mask from Ilaro was originally painted red, black and white; it now appears pink and black. The eyes are not completely pierced and cannot be used for “seeing through” by the wearer. The nostrils are pierced and offer an opportunity for seeing. The hair style is divided into four parts, each part carefully incised.

69.170.44. Mask, Gelede  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 16½”

This GELEDE mask, from an unidentified Yoruba area of Western Nigeria was at one time surmounted by an elaborate superstructure of which only a bird remains. It was originally painted blue, white, and red and some color is still visible. The nose and eyes suggest piercing but could not be used for seeing through. The proportions of its masses and lines are pure. It must have been carved by an experienced carver.
69.170.53. Mask, Gelede
Dahomey, Yoruba Wood, H. 17”

This GELEDE mask was carved in the area of Pobe, a town halfway between Ketu and Porto Novo in Dahomey. It was originally painted; traces of red, black and white color are still visible. The eyes and nostrils are pierced. A small naked male figure is seated on the forehead of this classical face.

69.170.50, 69.170.51, 69.170.52, 69.170.53. Masks, Gelede
Nigeria, Yoruba Wood, H. 11½”-15”

Four GELEDE masks whose precise places of origin have not yet been positively identified. (There is a very remote possibility that the masks were used by the EGUNGUN and not the GELEDE society.) They appear to have all been carved in the same area, very likely around Ilaro. All four masks are painted in many vivid colors; red, black, blue, green, yellow and purple. All are rather large and heavy. Two masks have a bird, one a leopard and one has two leopards on its head. The eyes and nostrils suggest piercing but again the openings are not cut all the way and could not have been used for looking through. One mask has elaborately carved hair parted in eight parallel places. The masks are impressive and powerful and again illustrate the rain forest emphasis on the gravitational focus centered in the center of the head. They are self-contained and do not allow the eye of the viewer to depart from the head. The smallest of the masks (C 50) is permanently housed at St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York.

69.170.188. Mask, Gelede
Nigeria, Yoruba Wood, H. 12”

This is a small and unusual GELEDE face mask from Ilaro. It is painted white with red lips and blue hair, eye borders, eyebrows and tribal scarifications. The eyes and lips are open. The size and shape of the mask suggests that it was worn by a very young person and unlike most GELEDE masks it was worn in front of the face, not on top of the head.
EGUN GUN

The EGUN GUN cult is part of one of the most important Yoruba religious rites. EGUN GUN is basically a spirit of a deceased person and represents an everpresent link between the generations. He takes an active interest in the activities of the community and the individual. He is, therefore, never far away from the living persons. The Yoruba believe in the importance of the total extended family which includes both living and dead.

EGUN GUN often appears as a specific person, usually forty days after his burial. He can also appear at any time and especially on important occasions held at the shrine consecrated to ancestral worship. The most common EGUN GUN festival takes place annually in June and lasts for seven days.

He appears covered completely from head to foot in a costume called AGO. He sees through a thickly woven net of raffia, varicolored cloth or animal skins and speaks in an unnatural treble voice. The special EGUN GUN wear masks.

69.170.31. Mask, Egungun
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 13½”

The style of this typical EGUN GUN mask places its probable origin in the Abeokuta area, by far the most prolific center of EGUN GUN art. A male face with two buck teeth, a stylized head and eight medicinal pouches on its forehead, it is surmounted by a pair of long rabbit ears held together by a pepper grinder (or SANGO axe) in front and a rabbit at the back of the ears. The ears are decorated with Hausa influenced relief motifs and triangular black and orange patterns. It is a strong and powerful mask with carefully balanced forms, lines and color.

69.170.30. Mask, Egungun
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 16½”

This unpainted example of a typical EGUN GUN mask is in all respects similar to the previous example. The ears lie straight up; the previous mask’s ears sweep gently towards the back. The details are simpler and the total effect is of a laughing creature.
This mask pays great tribute to the Yoruba sense of balance. The round line of the hair repeats itself in the line of the eyes and again in the line of the stylized beard. At the back of the head the SANGO axe (of the pepper grinder type) is cut by the black paint of the hair line matching the outer line of the extended rabbit ears of the mask. The two rabbit teeth and facial scarifications complete the face.

A small EGUNGUN mask that again could be compared to a GELEDE mask. However, this one has the traditional teeth of the EGUNGUN type. It is painted silver and black.

This mask departs from the previous examples. It has an elaborate hair style, large eyes and a well outlined mouth which shows no teeth. It is painted blue, white and red.

This is a strong, ferocious and sculpturally complicated mask. A small human face, painted red, with a white set of upper teeth and a black stylized beard, tilted at an angle. Two vertical horns give the mask a feeling of much more height than it actually has. At the back of the mask there are animal heads and three round containers. The total effect of the mask is that of a fearful and malicious spirit.

This EGUNGUN mask is strong and in a classical tradition. It represents a human head with an elaborate hairdo, sitting without a neck, on a round disc. At the back it is supported by an animal head with two long horns. The disc, suggesting round shoulders, contains a number of items including two small masks. The human head has traditional tribal markings with two added incised crosses and two decorative tribal markings in relief. The mouth is open with two buck teeth. There is also a stylized beard. This mask is carved in the traditional style of Adugbole.

The mask, representing a human head, sits on a disc. It lacks the usual elaborate hair style. Three small birds, carved separately, sit on the hair. The face is painted red.
69.170.46. Mask, Egungun  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11”

Another mask in the same tradition as the two previous ones has a much gentler expression and more delicate balance. The face is painted black, the eyes white and the elaborate hair style and facial scarifications black. The eyes and ears are pierced and the mouth is closed. The gentle feeling and classical balance of this mask is in close affinity to the GELEDE masks.

69.170.29. Mask, Egungun  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9”

This small EGUNGUN mask with two horns is on a round disc. It is more grotesque than the previous masks.

69.170.190. Mask, Egungun  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9½”

Not all EGUNGUN masks are worn as helmet masks on top of the head, some are used as face masks and are worn on the face. This method requires openings for the bearer to see and to breathe. Thus both the eye and mouth openings in this and the following masks correspond to human needs. This mask represents a human face treated with great simplicity and vigor. It has protruding eyes with double openings which are balanced by protruding mouth and teeth. The strong facial scarifications are in relief. These are no other body decorations. This mask was carved in the Oshogbo area and used primarily for medicinal purposes. It is called OLOJU TOFORO mask.

69.170.192. Mask, Egungun  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10”

This is an IBORI EGUNGUN mask from Ondo. It has some affinity to the previous masks; its proportions, however, and the relationships of lines, openings and masses are different. This IBORI EGUNGUN mask has a pronounced hairline and two deeply cut facial scarifications drawn diagonally across the cheeks. The two openings of the eye are vertical, unlike the previous mask’s horizontal openings. It has two mouth openings; one in an anatomically correct place, the other below the bottom lip.

69.170.191. Mask, Egungun  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9”

This IBORI EGUNGUN mask from Ijebu-Ode represents a human face with a long nose. The eyes have two vertical openings as does the nose but the nasal openings are not visible in the frontal position. The mask is humorous and possibly represents a white man.

69.170.18. Mask, Egungun  
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 10”

This is another humorous mask of a man with a large nose. It is painted blue with white eyes and teeth. It has high cheeks and an elongated but rounded chin. The face appears to be a half-moon shape from the side position. It is a “theatrical” mask of a “laughing white man.”
69.170.196. Mask, Egungun
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 8”
Another IBOJU EGUNGUN mask represents a man with a large nose. This small mask is painted black and was probably carved in the Ilawe area. It has small, narrow eyes and small protruding mouth with two rows of teeth showing. It again illustrates a white man.

69.170.49. Mask
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 12”
This janiform mask has an additional head attached by a long nail. It is a ferocious and complicated mask with strong and contradictory lines and masses full of triangles, straight lines and curvatures.

69.170.195. Mask
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 7½”
This TONBOLO mask is from Ondo and was worn by a young child in an EGUNGUN related ceremony. Very little is known about the exact relationship of this type of ceremony to the more complex and mature EGUNGUN cult. The mask is painted red, blue and white.

69.170.366. Mask
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 9½”
This mask, judging by the style and the scarifications, probably was carved somewhere in or near Ibadan. It is related to the EGUNGUN tradition but its exact use is not known. It represents a man, with a beard and a moustache made of leather. It is strongly individualistic and beautifully balanced.

69.170.16. Mask
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 8½”
Similar to the previous mask although smaller and less complicated, this mask is also a man's face with a leather moustache and beard.
69.170.14. Mask
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 7¼”

This small mask of unidentified origin represents a human face and is painted blue, white and red. Its functions are not known.

69.170.15. Mask
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11⅜”

This is a small and simple mask which represents a human face with two horns extending from the forehead. It has large openings for the eyes, a very small and narrow nose and small closed lips. It seems to have a greater affinity to the savannah type of sculpture. It is, however, a Yoruba made mask.

69.170.17. Mask
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 11”

This IGUNGUN-type mask which is painted black, white and yellow is from an unidentified place of origin. Its exact use is not known.

69.170.43. Mask
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, D. 13”

This mask, worn horizontally, represents a lizard among multicolored rocks. It is painted red, blue, green and yellow. It is sensitively balanced and has a great inner strength. Its exact use is not known.

69.170.19. Mask
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, D. 11½”

This is similar to the previous mask but represents a hare rather than a lizard. It is painted blue.

69.170.220. Mask, Epa
Nigeria. Yoruba Wood, H. 30”

An impressive janiform Epa mask from Ijoba Ekiti is painted brown, black and white. A double human face, carved in strong and decisive lines, is surmounted by a man riding a leopard. In spite of its size and bulk this mask has a great unity and does not appear to be as heavy as it really is. It is peaceful, strong and majestic.
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