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Temporary exhibition

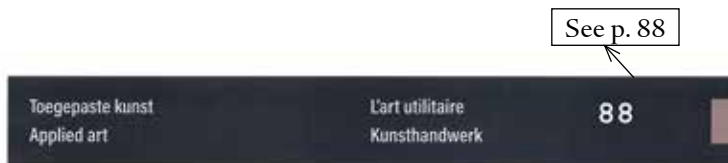
# UNRIVALLED ART

Curator  
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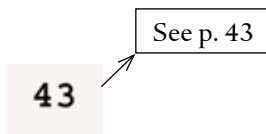
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## MASKS

For more than fifty years, a large mask – half human, half animal – was the symbol of this museum.

Most Congolese masks take the form of a human or an animal, or a mix of the two. Just as with statues, the style varies from the most breathtaking naturalism, to minimalism, to total abstraction.

What we are showing here in the display cases – the faces – is only a part of what the Congolese public could see. The wearers were also dressed in costumes and sometimes carried accessories. Some shook their ankle bells and danced a choreography to the rhythm of the musicians.

Isolated from costume and context, these faces on display have lost a large part of their identity.

Depending on the culture that a mask belonged to, it performed alone or in company. Some had a precisely defined identity, while others were widely deployed. Most masks had a connection with the world of the dead or with the world of nature spirits. They only performed at important occasions or at established ritual moments.

In the first half of the 20th century, masks were increasingly used on festive and profane occasions - if they did not entirely disappear from the scene. Many of the specimens that are on display here belong to the past. They no longer dance.

Most are carved from wood, but there are also masks in copper, ivory, or resin applied to a frame. They could be painted and decorated with feathers, beads, (cowrie) shells, and copper.

As in the rest of Africa, masks in Congo were almost always worn by men. The exception was the Lega. On rare occasions, women who were initiated into the *bwami* society wore the *lukwakongo* masks of their husband.



**Kifwebe mask (Songye-Kalebwe) - EO.o.o.30621**

1st quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Alstonia congensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1928. Collected by W.F.P. Burton (1920s).

*Kifwebe* (masks) belonged to the *bwadi bwa kifwebe*, a Songye male society. Its members had a reputation for having magical powers. They exercised social and political control over the population in order to keep the political elite in power, but also to counter possible abuses of power by chiefs. Masks used to participate in many important manifestations, such as the enthronement and the funeral of the chief, the funeral of members of the society, or the initiation of young men.

Male specimens, such as this one here, are polychrome and have a crest running from front to back. Their female counterparts are almost entirely painted white.



**Pakasa mask (Holo) - EO.1984.27.2**

2nd quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1984. Donated by Baron van der Elst.

This mask is called *pakasa* and represents a buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*). According to some sources, the wooden *pakasa* of the Holo did not dance at circumcision rites. Other sources state that the mask appeared *before* the boys were circumcised, and that it had to keep an eye on the children and women during the initiation period.



**Kalelwa mask (Tshokwe)** - EO.o.o.33776

ca. 1930. Wax or resin applied on fabric stretched over a wooden frame. RD Congo. Registered in 1931. Collected by G. de Witte (1931).

The *kalelwa* mask (derived from *lelwa*, cloud) performed during the *mukanda*, a male initiation ritual. One of its functions is to keep women and uncircumcised boys away from the *mukanda* camp. Its presence is also required to produce a remedy that would banish heavy rains.

The remarkable tower that takes the place of the headdress evokes the image of a termite mound. Among the Tshokwe, such a mound forms a passage between the world of the living and the world of the ancestors.



**Mask (Ngbandi)** - EO.o.o.36412

1st quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Alstonia boonei*). RD Congo. Registered in 1936. Collected by G. de Witte (1930s).

Little is known about Ngbandi masks. The *kokoro*, seers who were specialized in tracking down witches, had a mask as an attribute, which they wore at some ceremonies.



**Mweelu mask (Yaka)** - EO.o.o.27616

Late 1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1924. Donated by Father J. Van Wing.

During the *mukanda* (male initiation ritual) of the Yaka, dance masks carved from wood were used, as were masks made from braided fibres and cloth stretched over a frame. This second category, to which *mweelu* belonged, was symbolically and ritually the most important. In the ritual space where the circumcised boys stayed, *mweelu* performed to protect them and to make sure they adhered to dietary restrictions. Outside the initiation camp, it was worn by an experienced initiate, and it stole food for the boys from neighbouring villages.



**Kazebe or kakuungu mask (Yaka) - EO.o.o.34145**

Early 1st quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Croton mayumbensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1932. Collected by Father O. Butaye (1920s?).

The *kazebe* and *kakuungu* masks mainly performed at the *mukanda* (male initiation ritual, linked to circumcision) of the Yaka and the Suku. They possessed great powers and were the property of the *isidika*, the ritual specialist of the *mukanda*. Their main function was to protect the circumcised boys from numerous dangers.



**Mask (Isambo? Binji?) - EO.o.o.43137**

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

In terms of shape, this mask is inspired by the Kuba *nnup* that performed at the funeral of dignitaries to appease the spirit of the deceased. Based on available information, however, we cannot determine whether this mask, which originated in the upper reaches of the Sankuru, had the same function.



**Mask (Salampasu) - EO.o.o.43155**

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

Throughout their lives, Salampasu men were initiated into various societies that contributed to their prestige and social progress. Masks like this one originate from such a society. The generic name for it was *mufuampo* ('ancestor of raffia'). The masks of a society mainly performed at the funeral of members.



**Mushika mask (Lwalu? Kongo-Dinga?) - EO.o.o.43102**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by L. Liégeois (1920s).

This *mushika* mask represents a female character. Together with three other masks – male characters – it performed at lucrative dance tours. These were organized by young people during the dry season.

The four masks also came out at special occasions, for example during a lean hunting season, or when there was a downturn in the community's birth rate.



**Tulualembe mask-shield (Yela) - EO.o.o.29612**

1st quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Alstonia congensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1927. Collected by V. Benoit (1920s).

*Tulualembe* masks were no longer being made in the 1920s. Their function can probably be traced back to the *lilwa* society, which organized aspects of the social life of the Yela.



**Tyukusu mask (Woyo) - EO.o.o.35319**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1933. Collected by Father L. Bittremieux (1920s?).

This *tyukusu* mask belonged to the *bandunga* brotherhood, a branch of the old *bakama* society that was formed in the late 18th century. In the 20th century, these masks mainly participated in purification rites and rites for warding off natural disasters. They also performed at the funeral of dignitaries, at the enthronement of a chief, or at the reception of honoured guests. They had an imposing costume which consisted of large leaves from the banana plant. In the 19th century, the *bandunga* may also have played a role in the administration of justice.

The specific name given to each mask referred to a saying. Parts of the costume, special motifs on the face, or accessories that were held in the hand, brought this saying to life.



### ***Cibwabwabwa?* mask (Mbagani? Kambulu?) -**

EO.o.o.43098

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

This mask represents a male character. It was deployed when there were problems with hunting or fertility. But it also performed on other occasions: as entertainment, for instance, or at mourning ceremonies.



### **Anthropo-zoomorphic mask (Luba) - EO.o.o.23470**

2nd quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Ricinodendron rautanenii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1919. Collected by O. Michaux from Luulu village (1896).

This mask is *the* masterpiece of the museum's ethnographic collections. The artist's talents were never equalled by the numerous imitators who made copies. It is possible that the sculptor did not come from the same region as the person who commissioned it.

The presence of animal-like elements (buffalo horns) has led to various theories about the mask's use.

According to some, the iconography refers to the mythical characters who are associated with the buffalo, and the mask would have originated from the large *bambudye* (guardians of memories) society.

Others think that the horns framing the face recall certain rites of hunting societies.

For yet others, the mask, with its animalistic and human forms, has ties to an established iconography in certain cultures (especially Luntu and western Luba peoples). Their mask helmets with curved horns are associated with societies that are close to political power.





**Mask (Southern Tetela) - EO.o.o.19347**

Early 20th century. Wood (*Alstonia congensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1914. Collected by J. Maes (1910s).

These masks belonged to the *weetshi* (seer) of the southern Tetela. His task was to track down practitioners of *doka*, black magic. He put the mask on before appearing, silent and motionless, to the crowd.



**Kongu mask (Leka) - EO.o.o.2465-3**

Early 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1910. Donated by G.J. Dargent.

Among the Leka, quite abstract masks such as this one were worn by men who carried out the circumcision.



**Pongdudu/kpongadomba mask (Northern Ababua) -**

EO.o.o.11697

Early 20th century. Wood (*Alstonia congensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Collected by A. Hutereau (1910s).

This type of mask harks back to a representation of the ears that used to be in vogue among the Ababua. It may have been connected to war rites in the late 19th to early 20th century. The chief had the mask made and gave it to the most valiant warrior. Among the Ababua masks also performed at some palavers (group discussions).



**Mask (Luntu) - EO.1951.31.98**

Early 2nd quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Lannea welwitschii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1951. Acquired from R. Blondiau.

The precise function of this mask is unknown.



**Nkota mask (Luluwa) - EO.o.o.15399**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Donated by the Compagnie du Kasai.

This mask performed at the end of the *mukanda* (male initiation ritual) of the Luluwa.



**Mask (Bembe) - EO.1964.53.1**

1st quarter of the 20th century. Elephant bone, pigments. RD Congo. Acquired from A. Prigogine. Registered in 1964.

In terms of shape and material, this mask is related to the sculpted faces of the ritual universe of the Bembe.

The Bembe did not use masks during the initiation to their *bwamè*, a society that played an important role in moral, legal, and political issues, but they did have circular masks, made from gourd shells or elephant bone. These were placed on particular ritual and sacred objects — on the skulls of deceased initiates as protection, for example. Other Bembe initiation societies, known to several eastern Lega groups, also used masks within societies such as the *elandà*.



**Mask (Tabwa) - EO.1971.67.1**

1st quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Erythrina* sp.). RD Congo. Registered in 1971. Acquired from Madame Verheyleweghen.

In the late 19th to early 20th century, masks such as this may have been connected to important hunting societies. Later, in the 1970s, these masks, sometimes called *kiyunde*, were danced to foster the well-being of the community and to promote fertility. These masks may have had female counterparts.



**Ncwe mwa nkaand mask (Leele) - EO.1953.74.6023**

Artist: Matèp

2nd quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1955. Collected by Albert Maesen (1950s).

The masks of the Leele are animated by a nature spirit (*nghesh*) that manifests itself as soon as the wearer begins to dance. His gestures, together with the shrieks and chants that accompany him, bring the spirit to life in an expressive way.

Some Leele masks were *personae*: *mwaash amboy*, for example, an incarnation of the mythical hero Wóóto, or the female mask *Mbwekoyo*, which symbolizes Mbeenga, the wife of the first *nyimi* (king) Kombe a Deer. Apart from these, Leele peoples sculpted mourning masks. These were known by the generic name for a mask: *ncwe mwa nkaand* (head with the powerful decision). They danced at the death of a royal dignitary (*kólm*) or of the sculptor himself.



**Mbuya mask (Central Pende) - EO.o.o.15379**

Early 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Donated by the Compagnie du Kasai.

This mask danced at the conclusion of the *mukanda* circumcision rite. Although it represents a female character, it was worn by a man.



**Mask (Ngbaka? Mbanza?)** - EO.1951.13.32

2nd quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Alstonia congensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1951. Acquired from E. Beer.

These masks performed at the male *gaza* initiation, but little else is known about them. According to some witnesses, who saw the masks as late as the 1990s, they prevented women and uncircumcised boys from entering the *gaza* camp.



**Pwo mask (Tshokwe)** - EO.O.O.43143

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Vitex madiensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

The *pwo* ('woman') mask represents a female ancestor. It is very active during the *mukanda*, a male initiation ritual. Although a man dances with it, the mask still plays an important role as an emissary to women, especially the mothers of the newly circumcised boys.



**Biangolo mask (Komo)** - EO.1960.24.1

2nd quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Croton macrostachyus*). RD Congo. Registered in 1960. Acquired from E. Beer.

These masks belonged to the *babankunda*, a society of seers. They were worn at certain ritual meetings, at the initiation of new members of the society, or at the memorial ceremony of a deceased seer.

The masks were the personification of a spirit and were not allowed to be seen by ordinary people. Both a male (*biangolo*) and a female mask (*ibolè*) existed.



***Munjinga* mask (Biombo) - EO.o.o.43133**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

This type of mask played a role in the funerals of dignitaries. In addition to the presumably male mask, *munjinga*, there was also a presumably female mask, *tshimwana*.



***Bwoom* mask (Kuba) - EO.o.o.15393**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*), RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Donated by the Compagnie du Kasai.

*Bwoom*, is one of the three royal Kuba masks, along with *ngaady a mwaash* and *mwaash amboy*. It performed at the funeral of important people. The copper bands under the eyes are thought to represent the tears shed in mourning over the death.

## ARTISTIC EMULATION

During every session of the *mukanda*, the initiation rite for Yaka boys, masks were made. Afterwards, these were shown in public in the surrounding villages. The procession of initiated boys, who had become fully fledged men after their circumcision, gave everyone the chance to admire and compare the masks. The reputation of a Yaka mask was determined by its beauty and the inventiveness of its maker. The artists were therefore always looking for new ways to outdo each other and to surprise and charm their public. And even though most of the masks were destroyed after the *mukanda*, especially popular specimens were sometimes kept, with a view to the next session.

The masks had to fulfil a number of requirements in terms of form and iconography, but the competition between the artists unleashed a torrent of new themes and shapes — think of the dolls that were put on top of the masks, or the use of unusual colour combinations.

The masks shown here belong to three categories: *kholuka*, *ndeemba*, and *tsekedye*. Each one of them was worn when circumcised boys first showed themselves to the outside world. *Kholuka*, the most prestigious mask, danced alone. *Ndeemba*, the second most important mask, and *tsekedye* danced in pairs. The sculptor decided which of the three categories the mask should be in, depending on how high he assessed the sculptural quality of the face. Once this choice had been made, the headdress was produced so that it was iconographically in line with the chosen category.



**Mukanda mask (Yaka) - EO.1948.27.4**

2nd quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1948. Donated by Father J. Van Wing.

This artist shows great daring by choosing a palette of pastel colours of European origin — highly unusual for what is possibly a *kholuka* mask.



**Mukanda mask (Yaka) - EO.1948.27.38**

2nd quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Alstonia congensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1948. Donated by Father J. Van Wing.

On top of this mask, which shows the typical headdress of the *ndeemba*, is a wooden copy of a European earthenware pot. The pot is pierced by one of the sticks that form the headdress. It is a highly unusual model which would undoubtedly have attracted the audience's attention. It possibly refers to a funerary practice that was in vogue particularly with the Yaka's neighbours, the Kongo: European pots with the bottom intentionally pierced were placed on tree branches close to the grave.



**Mukanda mask (Yaka) - EO.1976.38.35**

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1976. Donated by A. Verheijden.

*Kholuka* masks were sometimes decorated with figures that look like marionettes. The artists had plenty of freedom in the choice of subject and thus had the opportunity to prove their originality. For instance, a frog or toad is found atop this *kholuka* mask. In the stories of the Yaka, these amphibians were regarded as arrogant and impatient creatures — qualities that the circumcised boys were warned against – that tried to deceive God in order to get a tail more quickly than the other animals. As punishment, they did not get a tail at all.



**Mukanda mask (Yaka) - SJ.351**

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Collected by Father G. Dumont (before 1927).

The *tsekedye* animal masks of the Yaka rarely represent a pig. Just as with the Tshokwe, the pig possibly symbolizes the uncontrollable, ill-mannered impulses that the initiated (and henceforth 'civilized') boys should guard against.

The originality of the artist is mainly in the way in which he has depicted the body of the pig.

Most animal masks belong to the *tsekedye* category (the least prestigious category). But when an artist was particularly pleased with the plastic quality of his creation, he could assign it to a higher category and, for example, make it a *ndeemba*.



**Mukanda mask (Yaka) - SJ.1303**

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Collected by Father M. Plancquaert (before 1924).

The originality of this mask is in the great refinement of the candlestick-form headdress, which is characteristic of *ndeemba* masks, and in the face, which is flanked by two snakes that are eating two antelopes — an allusion to the schooling of the circumcised boys during the *mukanda* ritual.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONTAINER

What are the elements of a Kongo fetish or *nkisi*?

The soul of the deceased or a supernatural spirit animates the *nkisi* and gives it its lifeforce. Ingredients from the animal, plant, or mineral realm, or small accessories such as beads, contribute to its magical power.

These charms are either enclosed in a figurative statue, or placed in a pouch, box, or shell. According to some researchers, the fact that a simple pouch is believed to possess as much power as an anthropomorphic sculpture demonstrates that the statue is only a carrier. They argue that aficionados of African art who are only interested in the statue ignore what, for Kongo users, is the essence: the magical ingredients or charms contained in them.

But why, then, did Kongo artists make figurative *nkisi*?

It is true that some heavily damaged statues remained in use because their power was intact. But there are also large *nkisi* that were given a new pair of legs because the old ones had been eaten away by insects. Does this not prove that users were sensitive to how the statue looked?

Compare this to the Mosan reliquary shrines in Belgium. Viewed from a religious perspective, they were only important because of the remains of the saints that they contained. Yet such shrines were frequently made by the best gold- and silversmiths, and often restored and further embellished over the centuries. This desire to embellish the ritually valuable by crafting a magnificent container for it — is that not also conceivable for Africa?



***Nkisi nkonde mungundu statue (Yombe)* - EO.0.0.22436**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Canarium schweinfurthii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1919. Former collection of Kangu Scheut missionaries. Collected in 1915.

The legs of this large *nkisi* had been damaged. For aesthetic, rather than ritual reasons, a local sculptor gave the statue a new pair of limbs.

Much care was taken to keep this *nkisi nkonde* intact. This may be because some of these prestigious, costly objects were owned by chiefs and contributed to their reputation.



***Nkisi statuette (Kotshi)* - EO.1967.63.225**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Angola. Registered in 1967. Former collection of KMKG-MRAH. Collected by E. Dartevelle in 1937.

This personal amulet (*nkisi*), which was meant to protect a house and its occupants, remained in use after the legs had been damaged. As a result, the figurine is no longer stable; despite this, it has never been restored.

## THE MAN BEHIND THE ART – A QUESTION OF STYLE

To be able to study the function of an object, you have to know its origin, including the cultural backgrounds of its makers. For example, an object can be sculpted by an artist of ethnicity X and subsequently be passed on within ethnicity Y. When it ends up from there in a collection, it may be attributed wrongly to ethnicity Y.

A thorough analysis of the style characteristics of an oeuvre can reveal traces of external influence. On the basis of this, you can formulate theories about trade networks or the spread of particular rites.

In the same way, you can try — just as with European art — to attribute an oeuvre, not to an ethnic group, but to an individual artist, thus transcending the outdated notion of ‘community art’.

In his work *Die Masken und Geheimbünde Afrikas* (1898), the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius was the first to call an African artist by name: Adugbologe, a Yoruba sculptor. But it was not until the first half of the 20th century that a few Belgian Africanists broke through the anonymity that had cloaked artists from Africa until then. The most well-known of them was undoubtedly Frans-Maria Olbrechts (1899-1958), former director of this museum.

Olbrechts is indebted to the art historian Giovanni Morelli (1816-1891) and the anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942). In his most famous work, *Plastiek van Kongo* (1946), Olbrechts identifies various styles based on his stylistic-anatomical method, the most iconic of which is the Master of Buli's. On the basis of a cup bearer collected from the region of Buli, Olbrechts was able to identify stylistically similar sculptures, all of which clearly differed from other works from the Luba/Hemba region.



**Cup bearer (Eastern Luba cultural area) - EO.o.o.14358**

Artist: Master of Buli

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Ricinidendron rautanenii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Collected by H.A. Bure (1907).

Various studies in the 1990s have shown that the Master of Buli was certainly of Hemba origin and lived in Kateba, far north of Buli. The same studies showed that the artist was locally remembered with the honorary title *Ngongo ya Chintu*, 'the great leopard, father of sculpted things'.

Since then, some authors no longer use Olbrecht's term 'Master of Buli', instead preferring 'Master of Kateba'.



**Female statue (Eastern Luba cultural area) - EO.1950.31.1**

Artist: Master of Buli

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Albizia* sp.). RD Congo. Registered in 1950. Collected by E. Foà (1897).



**Male statue (Eastern Luba cultural area) - EO.1950.31.2**

Artist: Master of Buli

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Albizia* sp.). RD Congo. Registered in 1950. Collected by E. Foà (1897).



**Caryatid stool (Eastern Luba cultural area) - EO.1948.37.9**

Artist: Master of Buli

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Albizia zygia*). RD Congo. Registered in 1948. Acquired by L.R. Bertrand in Bas-Congo (ca. 1898).

When we compare this piece with the two eastern Luba stools in the display case, we get a better image of the style characteristics of the Master of Buli.

According to some researchers, this piece was not made by the Master of Buli, like the cup bearer and the two small figurines in the display case, but by an imitator. One of the stylistic differences is that the face of this piece is supposedly rounder. But the hypothesis that we are dealing with two artists is still premature and is disputed by other researchers.



**Caryatid stool (Eastern Luba cultural area) - EO.o.o.17193**

Late 19th century. Wood (*Ricinodendron rautanenii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1914.

This 19th-century master sculptor, whose *maniera* points to Hemba influences, made various stools. One of them has a double caryatid and also conserved by the RMCA.



**Caryatid stool (Eastern Luba cultural area) - EO.o.o.17194**

Late 19th century. Wood (*Ricinodendron* sp.). RD Congo. Registered in 1902. Collected before 1897.

The museum of Tervuren still has several other chief's stools with a caryatid. They were made in the late 19th century by the same artist.

The caryatids in this style have a round and exposed forehead that is characteristic of eastern Luba pieces from the Luvua River region.



***Phemba mother-and-child (Yombe)* - EO.o.o.37964**

Artist: Master of Kasadi

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Nauclea latifolia*). Angola / RD Congo. Registered in 1937. Collected by Father L. Bittremieux (1930s?).

Olbrechts's stylistic-anatomical method was adopted by other researchers such as Ezio Bassani, who was able to identify several 'Masters of' (a term that is also used for Flemish or French Primitives whose names we do not know). One of them is the Master of Kasadi.

In the early 1980s, a corpus of works was attributed to the Master of Kasadi. At that time, only *phemba* maternity statues had been described, such as this specimen. The name Master of Kasadi refers to the village of the same name in the Mayombe region, where two of these pieces were collected. Before the precise collection site was known, the artist was mostly referred to as the Master of the Briey Maternity Statue, named after a European owner of one of these renowned *phemba* statues.

Generally, pieces by the Master of Kasadi are characterized by their powerful, emaciated face.



***Mask (Yombe)* - EO.o.o.37966**

Artist: Master of Kasadi

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*). Angola/RD Congo. Registered in 1937. Collected by Father L. Bittremieux (1930s?).

After the maternity statues, a small number of so-called *nganga* masks (a *nganga* is a soothsayer or traditional healer) were also attributed to the Master of Kasadi. Three of them are kept in Tervuren. They show the gaunt face that characterizes the style of this artist. The inside of the masks by the Master of Kasadi is also carved in a specific way.



***Mask (Yombe)* - EO.1967.63.42**

Artist: Master of Kasadi

1st quarter of the 20th century (ca. 1900). Wood (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*). Angola / RD Congo. Registered in 1967. Former collection of KMKG-MRAH. Collected by P. Janssens (ca. 1927-1928).

This mask is remarkable because it originates from Cabinda, an exclave of Angola. The other pieces by the Master were acquired in Congo, mainly in Kasadi.



### **Funerary statue (Yombe) - EO.1967.63.448**

Artist: Master of Kasadi

1st quarter of the 20th century. Angola / RD Congo. Registered in 1967. Collected by E. Darteville in Cabinda (1937). Former collection of KMKG-MRAH.

The grave statues were discovered and included in the oeuvre of the Master of Kasadi long after the maternity statues and the masks. This specimen is interesting because the collector was told that the maker — the Master of Kasadi — originated from Cabinda. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that several

pieces by the Master were acquired in Cabinda. It may be necessary to relocate the epicentre of production, thought until now to have been in Kasadi.

Whatever the case, it is almost certain that the Master produced this grave statue later in life.



### **Mask (*mbuya*) representing a chief (*fumu*) (Central Pende) - EO.o.o.32128**

Artist: Gabama a Gingungu

1st quarter of the 20th century (1920s). RD Congo. Registered in 1930. Donated by W. Retivof (through P. Golenvaux).

In the 1980s, the American art historian Z. Strother followed in the footsteps of Olbrechts. Through fieldwork and discussions with contemporary artists, she managed to reconstruct the biography of several Pende sculptors.

Based on photographs of the mask shown here, and on the basis of shape and technique, the Pende artists that she interviewed formally recognized the hand of Gabama a Gingungu (1890?-1965). He would have made the mask in the 1920s. Several sculptors immediately identified this piece as the work of Gabama based on iconographic and stylistic details, such as the pyramidal tragus of the ear, the hairstyle, or the upturned nose with large nostrils. The sculptors from the 1980s could still remember this famous artist, and considered him the best of them all.

Gabama a Gingungu, born in the Nyoka-Munene region, learned his craft from his uncle Maluba (1870?-1935) — a renowned artist in his own right, who, however, was quickly outclassed by his nephew. After a while, dancers preferred to commission their masks from Gabama than from Maluba. In the space of a few years, Gabama's reputation spread throughout a large part of the Pende area, and the commissions poured in. From the 1930s, he also developed an effective sales strategy by travelling through villages in the region, looking for customers. He remained active as a sculptor until the end of his life, but from the 1950s, he concentrated on *ikhoko*, small masks that were worn as pendants. These were easier to craft as his body grew weaker with age.

## A HISTORY OF CHAIRS

Testimonials from the 19th and early 20th century tell us that seemingly ordinary manufactured goods from the West rapidly acquired great social cachet in Africa, and more specifically in Central Africa.

Local rulers thought that artefacts such as umbrellas, parasols, chairs with backrests, and chaises longues could perhaps add new lustre to their old regalia. Because the objects came from faraway and were difficult to acquire, they could use them to display their social status. In order to meet the demand, and to satisfy the new taste of the buyers, local artists and craftsmen – especially among Kongo peoples – made objects that were inspired by European designs and decorations.

Among the Tshokwe, this craving for the new led some leaders to replace the traditional chief's stool with European-inspired chairs with backrests. The way in which the chiefs sat, however, was not suited to these new thrones. Moreover, the relief sculpture on the backrest made it impossible to sit back comfortably.

In the 1920s, the French woodcarver Pierre-Émile Legrain made different types of chairs, some of which were inspired by African pieces from the Ngombe and the Ashanti. Jacques Doucet bought a collection of four of these chairs. It is not difficult to find the source of inspiration: a Tshokwe chair inspired in turn by a European specimen!





**Chief's chair (Tshokwe) - EO.o.o.43166**

3rd quarter of the 19th century . Wood (*Alstonia* sp.). RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

This type of *ciwamo* (chair) is inspired by late-18th- and 19th-century Portuguese chairs. *Ciwamo* were decorated with more or less complex motifs on the crosspieces and the backrest. Here, a *cihongo/tshihongo* mask is depicted on the frontal crosspiece. That is not a neutral choice, because the mask is the personification of a powerful and benevolent spirit that is close to power. The mask was worn by the chief himself, or by one of his sons.



**Ladle (Woyo?) - EO.o.o.27589**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1924. Collected before 1897.

The popularity of European objects in 19th-century Lower Congo led some artists and craftsmen to adjust their iconographic and decorative vocabulary and to draw on European wood carving motifs. The handle of this spoon is inspired by the rest of a Louis-Philippe chair. It attests to a 'European fashion', similar in many ways to Japonism, the Japanese fashion that created a furore in Europe in the second half of the 19th century.



**Elembo chief's chair (Ngombe) - EO.o.o.17220**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Wood, upholstery nails. RD Congo. Registered in 1914. Collected before 1897.

This type of chair known as *elembo* was used in the 19th and early 20th century by peoples who lived on the banks of the Gira River: the Lobo, the Libinja, and the Ngombe. The non-decorated specimens with short legs belonged to ordinary men. They could be used as a seat in pirogues.

There were also, however, sumptuously decorated chairs with longer legs. The decorations were applied using European ornamental upholstery studs, which, in the first half of the 19th century, were rare and expensive in this area. Such chairs belonged to the estate of chiefs and dignitaries.

## GIAMBOLOGNA AND THE KONGO BLACKSMITHS

The landing of the Portuguese explorer Diogo Cão on the shores of the Kongo kingdom, in 1482, was the start of a centuries-long relationship between the Catholic Portuguese and the Kongo peoples. The former even attempted to convert the Kongo population to Christianity, albeit with very mixed results. This history is attested by chiefs' crucifixes, locally known as *nkangi kidityu*. Some are copies of European models, others are free adaptations and clearly show a local style. For a long time, several of these *nkangi kidityu* were regarded as copies of medieval Catalan Christ figures. Recent research, however, has revealed that they are daring reinterpretations of the *Crucified Christ* by Giambologna (1529-1608). This was, without a doubt, the most widespread crucifix in early-17th-century Europe, and we know that several specimens reached the Kongo kingdom. One typical characteristic of Giambologna's Christ figures is the drooping lock of hair on the side of the face — and we also find these on our pseudo-Catalan Christ figures.



**Giambologna-inspired chief's crucifix (*nkangi kidityu*)  
(Kongo) - HO.1954.19.2**

17th century? Copper alloy, lead, wood. RD Congo/Angola.  
Registered in 1954. Former collection of L.M. Guebels.



**Christ in the style of Giambologna collected from the  
Kongo - HO.1963.67.2**

17th century? Western Europe (site of production). Registered in 1963. Former collection of C. Ralet.



**Giambologna-inspired Christ from a *nkangi kiditu*  
(chief's crucifix) (Kongo) - HO.1954.19.4**

17th century? RD Congo/Angola. Registered in 1954.  
Former collection of L.M. Guebels.



**Giambologna-inspired Christ from a *nkangi kiditu*  
(chief's crucifix) (Kongo) - HO.1955.9.12**

17th century? RD Congo/Angola. Registered in 1954.  
Former collection of R. Wannyn.

## ARTISTIC CROSSROADS IN KANANGA

In the 1880s, Nsapo-Nsapo/Zappo-Zap, the chief of the Songye-Eki people, was heavily extorted by Pania Mutombo and Lupungu. These Songye-Sanga and Songye-Kalebwe chiefs were important links in the trade in slaves and ivory established in this part of Congo by Tippu Tip from Zanzibar.

In 1887, the Belgian officer Paul Le Marinel took the hounded Songye-Eki under his protection for diplomatic and military reasons. In the following years, and especially in 1888, the Belgian authorities in Congo ensured that this people could settle permanently at a location to the west of the current city of Kananga.

The Songye-Eki, also called the 'Nsapo-Nsapo' or 'Nsapo' after their chief, arrived in an area unknown to them, which was mainly populated by Luluwa and western Luba. This created a certain cultural blend that had a particular impact on art.

The Nsapo-Nsapo style discussed in scientific literature is the result of a succession of significant historical events, and of the cultural exchange that arose from them. Several items in the museum collections perfectly embody this hybridization of the Nsapo-Nsapo style.



**Cult statuette with a cup (Luluwa) - EO.o.o.7158**

4th quarter of the 19th century (1890s). Wood (*Albizia gummifera*). RD Congo. Registered in 1912. Former collection of De Bruyn.



**Bwanga bwa Bwimpe cult statuette with a cup (Luluwa)**

- EO.o.o.7156

4th quarter of the 19th century (1890s). RD Congo. Registered in 1912. Former collection of De Bruyn.



***Nkishi* statue (Songye-Eki or Nsapo-Nsapo)** - EO.o.o.43952  
4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Vitex* sp.). RD Congo.  
Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

In terms of style, this *nkishi* statue undoubtedly belongs to the Songye-Eki culture. It was either taken along by the migrating Nsapo Nsapo, or sculpted shortly after their arrival in the area of Luluabourg.



**Statuette (Nsapo-Nsapo)** - EO.o.o.16611  
4th quarter of the 19th century (1890s). Wood (*Crossopteryx febrifuga*). RD Congo. Registered in 1914.

The general shape of this statue is very similar to classic Eki art, but the gesture of the right hand is more in line with the Luluwa tradition, especially ritual statues that hold a cup in the palm of the hand.

## THE INFLUENCE OF TEKE ART ON NEIGHBOURING PEOPLES

Several Congolese cultures used to be known for their knowledge of the magical arts. Examples include the Songye, the Kongo, and the Teke.

Just like finished products such as fabrics, ceramics, and weapons, magical objects (whether or not sculpted) were traded. For example, in the early 20th century, the future Kuba king Kot-A-Pey commissioned various protective *nkishi* (statues or objects with a magical charge) from Kongolo, a Songye artist renowned as a specialist in the *ars magica*.

Certain groups among the Bandundu peoples, from South-west Congo, used magical objects such as the *nswu* — a popular, multifunctional fetish — which originated from the Teke. Initially, they were simply imported by the Teke's neighbours, but these peoples later developed their own production. The magical objects often retained visible traces of their origins. For example, dozens of *nswu* produced by the Yansi had features typical of Teke art and culture, such as a male chignon and facial scarifications. At the same time, these Yansi *nswu* have their own design features, such as the flatter nose of some specimens.

Such plastic references either indicated kinship (i.e. to Teke origins) or were an attempt to give the statue, as it were, a 'Teke stamp' that would ensure its effectiveness.





**Nswo statuette (Yansi) - EO.1948.19.18**

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1948.  
Collected by Father P. Swartenbroeckx (1940s?).

This Yansi *nswo* has the male chignon and facial scarifications that are typical of Teke art.

By contrast, the flat, triangular nose is characteristic of the Yansi.



**Nswo statuette (Yansi) - SJ.1671**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Collected by Father  
K. Cappelle (before 1932).

This Yansi *nswo* is female, but has a male Teke chignon.



**Makowa statuette (Buma) - EO.o.o.139**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Nauclea pobeguinii*).  
RD Congo. Registered in 1902. Donated by S. Lovisetti.

This statue, which was used for therapeutic rites by the Buma, has Teke facial scarifications.



**Nswo statuette (Teke) - EO.1951.43.2.**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Crotonogyne poggei*). RD Congo. Registered in 1951. Acquired from H. Elias.

This *nswo* has many Teke iconographic-stylistic elements, such as the male chignon and the vertical scarifications on the face.

## FEMALE CREATION

In Congo, three-dimensional figures are rarely made by women. Wood and ivory carving and forging — the most common techniques for making such figures — are primarily male activities.

This also applies to ceramics, despite it usually being a female occupation. Once pottery becomes figurative, women are no longer allowed to make it. Anthropomorphic Kongo ceramics are the work of male potters. Amongst the Meje and Makere peoples from north-east Congo, women only made the belly of figurative jugs; the cephalomorphic (head-shaped) necks of the jars were sculpted by men.

There is, however, a magnificent exception to this rule: the *mbwoongitwool* of Kuba peoples — figurative statuettes that were exclusively produced by women. They worked a paste of precious red *tool* (or *tukula*) vegetal powder, mixed with sandy clay. The result is little known to the public, but attests to an amazing creativity.

The *mbwoongitwool* did not possess ‘magic powers’, but were mainly kept for use during funeral rituals. When a man or woman of a certain status died, their closest relative gave a *mbwoongitwool* to the other family members. Several pieces accompanied the deceased in the grave. They were attached to the side of the coffin, but flatter *mbwoongitwool* were laid under the corpse. Other pieces, for example with representations of animals, were placed on the body.



**Backrest-shaped *mbwoongitwool* (Kuba) - EO.o.o.15231**

4th quarter of the 19th century. *Tool* wood powder (*Pterocarpus* sp.) and sandy clay. RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Donated by the Cie du Kasai.



**Backrest-shaped *mbwoongitwool* (Kuba) - EO.o.o.28550**

4th quarter of the 19th century. *Tool* wood powder (*Pterocarpus* sp.) and sandy clay. RD Congo. Registered in 1925. Collected by L. Rom (1890s).



**Dried catfish-shaped *mbwoongitwool* (Kuba) - EO.o.o.29623**

4th quarter of the 19th century. *Tool* wood powder (*Pterocarpus* sp.) and sandy clay. RD Congo. Registered in 1927. Collected by L. Achten (1920s). Donated by H. Schouteden.

Dried catfish sold in markets were usually affixed on sticks. The artist who created this object did not forget to depict this accessory.



**Horned-head-shaped *mbwoongitwool* (Kuba) -**

EO.o.o.35025

1st quarter of the 20th century. *Tool* wood powder (*Pterocarpus* sp.) and sandy clay. RD Congo. Registered in 1933. Collected by L. Achten (1920s).

This atypical *mbwoongitwool* possibly refers to Kuba myths, such as the one about a prominent man (a *nyimshoong*) whose wife gave birth to a billy goat. The story goes that, ever since this astonishing incident, the *nyimshoong* wore a goatskin hat.



***Mbwoongitwool* in the shape of a recipient used for vegetable oil and *tool* powder for cosmetic purposes (Kuba)**

- EO.o.o.37578

4th quarter of the 19th century. *Tool* wood powder (*Pterocarpus* sp.) and sandy clay. RD Congo. Registered in 1937. Donated by J. Walschot.



***Mbwoongitwool* in the shape of a *tool* powder box lid  
(Kuba) - EO.1953.74.6833**

1st quarter of the 20th century. *Tool* wood powder (*Pterocarpus* sp.) and sandy clay. RD Congo. Registered in 1956. Collected by A. Maesen (1950s).



***Mbwoongitwool* shaped like a traditional pillow (Kuba) -  
EO.o.o.45543**

1st quarter of the 20th century. *Tool* wood powder (*Pterocarpus* sp.) and sandy clay. RD Congo.



***Mbwoongitwool* in the shape of a *tool* powder box lid  
(Kuba) - EO.1954.40.31**

4th quarter of the 19th century. *Tool* wood powder (*Pterocarpus* sp.) and sandy clay. RD Congo. Registered in 1954. Donated by J. Vansina.



**Mbwoongitwool in the shape of a salt block (Kuba) -**  
EO.1971.44.2

4th quarter of the 19th century. *Tool* wood powder (*Pterocarpus* sp.) and sandy clay. RD Congo. Registered in 1971. Donated by the Amis du Musée.

In some regions of Congo, salt was a particularly important commodity.



**Turtle-shaped mbwoongitwool (Kuba) -** EO.1953.74.7024

1st quarter of the 20th century. *Tool* wood powder (*Pterocarpus* sp.) and sandy clay. RD Congo. Registered in 1956. Collected by A. Maesen (1950s).



**Dugout-shaped mbwoongitwool (Kuba) -** EO.1953.74.7214

4th quarter of the 19th century. *Tool* wood powder (*Pterocarpus* sp.) and sandy clay. RD Congo. Registered in 1956. Collected by A. Maesen (1950s).

## THE SIGNATURE

Art reveals itself as the work of an individual through the ‘stylistic signature’: the sum of all the stylistic features that distinguish the work of an artist from that of his colleagues. And just as in European art, such signatures can be both conscious and unconscious.

The arrival of writing also had huge consequences for Congolese art. Some sculptors and wood carvers, especially those with European customers, signed their work with their name, thus strengthening the individual character of their stylistic signature. Two of the best-known artists who worked in this way were active in Lower Congo in the first half of the 20th century: the ceramicist Voania de Muba and the gourd engraver Benoît Madya. Here, however, we introduce an artist from North-east Congo: Songo, an Avongara-Zande chief who made both sculptures and wood carvings.

In this region of Congo, some sculptors had been using ‘graphic signatures’ long before writing came into fashion. For example, the makers of *nobarra/negbamba* stools applied geometric motifs (circles, triangles, stars) to the base of the seat that were characteristic of an artist or his workshop. Such stools were destined for the women of the Mangbetu and their neighbours, such as the Makere. The act of carving the mark and covering it with red wood powder, can be seen as a good-luck wish to the future owner.





***Nobarra stool (Mangbetu)*** - EO.o.o.2607-1

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1911. Collected by Mr. Fraipont (1900s?).



***Negbamba stool (Makere)*** - EO.o.o.3121

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1911. Collected by C. Delhaise (1909-1910).

This stool was described by its collector as a 'chief's seat' but it is clearly in the shape of women's seats.



**Carved gourd bowl (Avongara-Zande) - EO.1958.37.67**

Artist: Songo

1910s. RD Congo. Registered in 1958. Donated by the Colonial Office.

Songo once told the German zoologist H. Lang that he could copy the humorous drawings from European newspapers. The caricatural characters that are engraved on this calabash, are perhaps an example of that.



**Anthropomorphic container (Avongara-Zande) - EO.1959.48.53**

Artist: Songo

1910s. Wood and bark. RD Congo. Registered in 1959. Acquired from Father A. Leysbeth.

Songo signed most of his works with 'SONGO ASSALI', literally: 'Songo made this'. This type of object was mainly for storing personal possessions such as jewellery.

## SCULPTURE

Some cultures in Congo practice sculpture, but do not make masks. Other cultures only make masks, although this is very unusual. And finally, there are groups, especially in the south of the country, that have produced both sculpture and masks.

This display case mainly shows anthropomorphic and anthropo-zoomorphic figures made from wood. Zoomorphic figures were also made. Besides wood, materials such as stone, ivory, clay, and copal were used. Wrought-iron statuettes are very rare. Figures made from copper alloy attest to early Christian-European influences.

A few of these statues are centuries old, but most were made between 1850 and the mid-20th century.

Some were multifunctional, others had a well-defined role. Some were worshipped individually, others were used by the whole community, or by members of specific societies or social categories. Most were the property of prominent people such as ritual experts, chiefs, or other dignitaries.

Many statues were believed to possess supernatural powers. These emanated from the deceased or from non-human beings, such as nature spirits, and they were activated by means of consecration rites. Animal, herbal, or mineral elements, as well as manufactured goods such as nails or razorblades, were often added to the statues.

Several cultures in Congo use other terms for statues that are charged with a 'magic power' than for statues that have not yet been consecrated. In addition, there were also statues without powers, such as grave statues that were only intended to commemorate the deceased.



**Kakungu statue (Metoko) - EO.o.o.32672**

Ca. 1920-1930. Wood (*Pterocarpus tinctorius*), pigments (laundry blue). RD Congo. Registered in 1930. Donated by F.J. Aurez.

Statues of this type adorned the graves of dignitaries of the *bukota*, a brotherhood that played an important role among the Metoko. They temporarily received the soul of the deceased, so that he could make sure that his funeral proceeded according to plan.



**Statue 'of Manda' (Tabwa) - EO.o.o.31661**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Lannea antiscorbutica*). RD Congo. Registered in 1930. Collected by E. Storms (1884-1885).

This statue played a role in the veneration of ancestors of important lineages. *Dawa* (amulets) that were the property of the deceased could be placed next to him or attached to the statue. While several pieces in the Storms collection were obtained during his military campaigns, it is unclear how this particular piece was acquired.



**Esusany'o statue. (Bembe / Zoba) - EO.o.o.14797**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Cordia millenii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Collected by A. Pilette (1910s).

Ancestral statues such as this are associated with the personal and social status of both those who are commemorated by them and the person who commissioned them.



**Statue (Ndengese) - EO.o.o.3699**

Late 3rd quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Quassia* sp). RD Congo. Registered in 1912. Collected before 1897.

These statues had a function during memorial ceremonies for a deceased *etotshi* (dignitary). In the 1920s, Joseph Maes, a curator at the museum of Tervuren, published one of the few articles about these busts, which are found among the Ndengese and a number of neighbouring peoples.



**Lusingiti statue (Hemba) - EO.1972.1.1**

Mbulula atelier (Niembo style)

2nd quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Trichilia retusa*). RD Congo. Registered in 1972. Acquired from E. Deletaille.

*Singiti* represent ancestors of important lineages. These statues, and the religious practices associated with them, were very prominent in the east of Congo, among the Hemba, the Buyu, and the Bembe.



**Statue (Mamvu?) - EO.o.o.39480**

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1939. Collected by M. Mosselmans (1910s-1920s).

According to one theory, this statue had a funerary function; according to another it was intended to be purely decorative. 'Ornamental statues', sometimes also called *oha*, are mainly known among the Zande, the Mamvu, and the Mangbetu.



**Malwambi statue (Mbala) - SJ.1988**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Collected by Father T. Monnens before 1933.

*Malwambi* protected *bamfumu* (chiefs), in particular against serious illnesses.



**Statue (Kalundwe) - EO.o.o.23459**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Ricinodendron rautanenii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1919. Collected by O. Michaux (1890s).

This atypical statue, carved in light wood, probably played a role in an ancestral cult.



**Sculpture (Ngbandi) - EO.o.o.3688**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1912. Collected before 1897.

This used to be considered a fetish, but it is arguably an extremely rare example of an anthropomorphic neck rest.



**Statue (Lori) - EO.o.o.3692**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. South Sudan (former Lado enclave). Registered in 1912. Collected by C. Lemaire. (1900s).

This sculpture, used as a grave marker, also helped to preserve the memory of the deceased. It probably had to be surrounded by forked poles, which symbolically referred to the hunt or to cattle-breeding.



**Inungu Statue (Djonga) - EO.o.o.29703**

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1928. Collected by V. Benoit (1920s).

When a man was judged by the court of *nkumi* (dignitaries) and refused to pay his fine, an *inungu* was placed in or in front of his home. The statue served as a warning.



**Kashiankolo statue (Mbagani) - EO.o.o.43942**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

A *kashiankolo* was unusually strong and had a reputation for being very dangerous, as it could even kill. Its twisted hands are reminiscent of a corpse.



**Mpwuu statue (Yansi) - EO.o.o.26509**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1922. Collected by Father J. van Wing ca. 1920.

*Mpwuu*, an important protective fetish, was associated with the chiefs of villages or lineages. Sometimes, a *mpwuu* was accompanied by one or two other sculptures: a woman or child and a servant (*muley*). A child and a *muley* belong with this specimen, both of which are kept in the RMCA reserves.



**Khaaka statue (Suku) - EO.1948.40.51**

18th century? Wood (*Vitex congolensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1948. Collected by J. Verbist?

The word *khaaka* may be translated as 'mother of the clan'. This old power statue was associated with the leaders of the powerful Mutangu chiefdom. Another statue, which was found in the same chiefdom in the 1950s, attests to the historical dimension that these kinds of objects can have. This second statue, which never made it into a collection, was made from the wood of a tree where, during the 18th-century battle of Zumbu A Vumvu against the Suku, a *kiamfu* (sovereign) of Lunda origin was killed. The jaw of the *kiamfu* was taken by the Mutangu chief as a trophy and attached to the statue.



**Mosilo statue? (Lengola) - EO.1954.50.16**

2nd quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1954. Acquired from M. Dumoulin.

*Mosilo* statues were placed in the home of the man who was tasked with the initiation of young men, who were also circumcised on this occasion. The presence of *mosilo* indicates that such an initiation was in progress.

After the ritual, some *mosilo* were left behind to decompose.





**Statue (Tumba) - EO.o.o.2069-1**

Early 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1910. Donated by L. Vandenbroeck.

Named *bobole* or *bosongo*, these objects were made from the wood of trees that naturally displayed human forms. They were brought to the village by the sculptor and ‘auctioned’ there. The buyer was usually an important dignitary. After the sale, the figurine was put on a mat in the home of the new owner. Based on what we now know, no rites were associated with them.



**Statue (Mbole) - EO.o.o.40633**

4th quarter of the 19th century (1890s). Wood (*Commiphora* sp.). RD Congo. Registered in 1945. Donated by the Stoclet family.

This statue belongs to the *lilwa* brotherhood, which played a leading legal and political role among the Mbole. It represents someone who was hanged for sinning heavily against the rules of the *lilwa*. Statues such as this one must have served, among other things, as an example for young people during their initiation into the *lilwa*.



**Statue (Pindi? Hungaan?) - EO.1965.38.1**

1st quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1965. Acquired from J. Walschot.

We do not know the precise function of this large statue, but given its origin, its iconography, and its dimensions, it must have been an important power statue, which was associated with the chief.



**Statue (Mbala) - SJ.1913**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Collected by Father C. Lambin before 1933.

Based on its iconography, this statue can either be classified among *kiluba* fetishes, or, and that is much more plausible, among *pindi* fetishes.

A *kiluba* protected the clan and had healing properties.

A *pindi*, which consisted of a statue of a musician and a mother figure, was the property of the clan chief. This type of fetish was used in succession rites for chiefs, but also during wars and epidemics.



**Ndop statue (Kuba) - EO.o.o.15256**

18th century? Wood (*Crossopteryx febrifuga*). RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Donated by the Compagnie du Kasai.

*Ndop* are 'portrait sculptures' of the *nyim* (rulers) of the Kuba kingdom. They were made after the death of the ruler that they represent. In the first instance, they were used during rites around the funeral and succession of the deceased and had to calm his *mween* (spirit). After these ceremonies, they mainly served as a memorial.

The *ndop* shown here represents Kot-a-Ntshey, an 18th-century Kuba king. The statue was probably made between 1760 and 1780.



**Statue known as 'Ilunga Mukulu' (Luluwa) - EO.o.o.43854**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

This statue was part of the *bwanga bwa Bukalenga*, a cult that strengthened the authority and power of the chief, and ensured the well-being of the people and the connection with the ancestors. Statues of this type probably also had a commemorative function.



**Nkosi statue? (Yaka) - SJ.1280-1**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Collected by Father A. Pauwels before 1928.

A *nkosi* was a power statue that was mainly used in the struggle against sorcerers and other criminals. This specimen probably formed a pair with a male statue, which the museum's researchers have not yet managed to identify with certainty.



**Statue (Zande? Mangbetu?) - EO.1967.63.714**

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1967. Former collection of KMKg-MRAH.

We are not entirely sure of the function of certain wooden statues among the Zande and a number of neighbouring peoples. Some specimens from the 1910s were purely intended to be aesthetically pleasing; others may have functioned as grave statues or, according to some observers, been used in 'adolescent games'.



**Statue (Ngbaka) - EO.o.o.9200**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1912. Collected by J. Perlo (1912).

This statue represents the mythical hero Seto. The RMCA's collection also contains a statue of Nabo, sister and wife of Seto, which together with this statue forms a pair.

These two *kpikima* (figurines) had a function during *ndaba* rites for curing physical and mental conditions.



***Nkisi nkonde* statue (Yombe? Kakongo?) - EO.o.o.7943**

1st quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Canarium schweinfurthii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1912. Collected by A. Delcommune in 1878.

This *nkisi nkonde* was initially the property of Ne Cuco — one of the major chiefs of the city of Boma, and a man with whom the Belgian trading-post manager Alexandre Delcommune had a conflict.

This *nkisi* was of great importance. When Delcommune's men confiscated the statue, it was practically treated as a hostage-taking by the Kongo leaders. Ne Cuco was even prepared to pay a ransom to get the statue back.

Delcommune was well acquainted with this fetish, famous throughout the region — indeed, he had used it himself in the past. On that occasion, an expensive 'rental' of the statue from Ne Cuco had been arranged on the advice of a local official. The young Delcommune wanted to use the statue to track down deserters who had fled from him.

Delcommune played on the fear that the *nkisi* aroused in order to pressure the population into handing over deserters – who were indeed captured.

The *nkisi* had to be activated by a *nganga* (soothsayer, traditional healer), who obviously had to be compensated for this. The *nganga* ceremonially hit a metal nail into Ne Cuco's *nkisi*. If the nail stayed put, according to Delcommune's report, the 'client's' request was accepted. If the nail fell out, however, it was decided that the *nkisi* had rejected the request.



**Nkishi statue (Songye) - EO.o.o.26055**

Late 18th century? Wood (*Vitex madiensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1921. Collected by J. Schwetz (1910s).

A *bwanga* is an object or assemblage of objects into which a *nganga* (soothsayer-healer) puts a *bishimba* — a mix of ingredients that protect against calamities such as sterility, sickness, or threats from sorcerers.

A *nkishi* is a *bwanga* in the form of an anthropomorphic statue or figurine. The *bishimba* are mostly introduced into the navel and head cavities.

These statues are pre-eminent mediators between the human and the supernatural world. They encourage the reincarnation of the deceased within the community and thus foster female fertility. They have other protective functions as well. The chest of this imposing figure is covered with red- and white-coloured patterns applied next to each other. These symbolize the two steps — a white one and a red one — of the initiation into the *bukishi* society, an institution that honoured the traditions, but was already disappearing in the 1950s.



**Nkisi nkonde statue (Yombe) - EO.o.o.19845**

2nd quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Canarium schweinfurthii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1917. Former collection of H. Pareyn.

*Nkonde* are actually *nkisi* (power statues) that are employed for the well-being of the community. They often controlled one or several serious illnesses that they inflicted on criminals and sorcerers that they were tasked with tracking down.

This specimen possibly carried the name *Mungundu* — a *nkonde* that is associated with illnesses that cause their victims to cough up blood.

## IVORY

Congolese artists have always carved ivory, an easy-to-work material that is also durable. Sometimes, ivory also had a symbolic dimension related to the colour white, or – as with Lega people — the strength of the elephant. A few other animal species can provide ivory that is suitable for carving, including the hippopotamus and the warthog.

Ivory (from elephants and also from hippos) only really became valuable as a result of the Arabo-Swahili and Arabo-Sudanese trade networks in the nineteenth century, and of course also as a result of interest from Europeans, who were already exporting it from the 16th century.

In the 19th and the 20th century, Kanyok, Luba and Songye hunters who had killed an elephant had to give the tusks to their ruler.

Although there were animals that produced ivory throughout Congo, only a few cultures have created a significant body of figurative works in the material, amongst others the Kongo, Luba, Lega, Hungaan and Pende. Whether in the form of humans or animals, almost all of them were small. Only the Lega carved large ivory masks.

Be they sabre handles, sceptres, stick knobs, side-blown horns, flutes, or pendants, most ivory objects were regularly handled. Consequently, over the years they have gained a very specific patina.

Some Congolese ivory was carved in the 16th century, but the majority of the works in this museum date from the 18th and 19th centuries.



***Idimu* mask (Lega) - EO.1955.3.53**

2nd quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Collected by D. Biebuyck in 1952. Registered in 1955.

Where masks are concerned, a few rare, generic types exist. Whether they are made of wood or ivory, are large or small, they all express the symbolic ties that the living maintain with deceased *bwami* members who have become ancestors. Forming a real connection between the generations, they take the place of and recall important initiates who have died and underline their constant presence among the living. Most such *idimu* masks were sculpted in wood and afterwards whitened with kaolin clay, but a few rare specimens, such as this one here, were carved from ivory. This mask was kept by Kalindé from the Pangi region, a man who had climbed to the rank of *lutumbo lwa kindi*. It was the property of the entire ritual community of the Pangi region. The initiated passed it on to his heir as soon as the latter had reached the required rank. During initiations, this *idimu* mask was exhibited on a braided *pala* rack, surrounded by smaller masks of ivory or bone. These were called *lukunqu*.



***Kitende* figurine (Lega) - EO.1977.17.1**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Acquired from V. Johannes. Registered in 1977.

In *bwami* society there are realistic images that represent specific animals, such as the pangolin, the snake, the crocodile, or the *kitende* frog, which you see here. It has no defence against attackers but can blow itself up like a balloon. Some proverbs associated with this defenceless animal with the ability to inflate its body allude to the newly initiated novice who behaves arrogantly despite his inexperience. Other aphorisms compare the frog with the highest initiate, who – wise and calm – refuses to get involved in risky undertakings.



**Iginga figurine (Lega) - EO.o.o.38614**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Acquired from A. Van Hooren. Registered in 1939.

Figurines in the form of a human were called *iginga* (plural *masinga*), whether they were made from wood or ivory. Each represented a specific character. Unfortunately, many of these figurines – including this one – were collected without the corresponding identity. Only those who were initiated into the highest rank of *bwami* society had the right to possess figurines made from ivory or elephant bone.

‘Whoever dies does not come back; no mushroom can grow on ivory.’ This saying was recited during the initiation to the rank of *kindi*. It equates the ivory figurines with the skeleton of the deceased, and the ivory masks with their skulls – vital parts of ancestors that never disappear, and thus symbolize the continuity between generations.



**Iginga figurine (Lega) - EO.1948.28.1**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Acquired from J. Javaux. Registered in 1948.

This figurine is an example of the so-called ‘bibendum’ style, named after the Michelin man. It seems to have been especially popular among southern Lega peoples.

All Lega objects in this display case reference *bwami* society. Its members were spread over various village communities and had considerable moral, political, and legal power.

*Bwami* was a strongly hierarchical society, with about five ranks — the number changed from region to region. Almost 80 per cent of men joined the first level, but only an elite could climb to the highest ranks.



**Iginga figurine (Lega) - EO.1955.3.55**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Collected by D. Biebuyck in 1952. Registered in 1955.

This figurine belonged to Sakungwa, a *bwami* member from the Pangi region, who climbed to the highest rank, *lutumbo lwa kindi*. It was one of the ivory figurines shown during *bèle muno*, the last ritual in the sequence that led to *lutumbo lwa kindi*. The statues were arranged in a circle, leaning against the headdress of the initiated members.





**Statuette (Nande? Pere? Lega?) - EO.1955.134.162**

Pre-18th century? Elephant ivory covered with hematite. RD Congo. Registered in 1955. Collected by G. Passau ca. 1909.

The original function of this very old statuette is unknown. It was probably incorporated in the early 20th century by one of the many *isumba* brotherhoods of the Pere or the Nande. The initiation into an *isumba* meant, among other things, that you learned the symbolism of figurines and other objects that were associated with the brotherhood.



**Transverse horn (Mangbetu cultural area) - MO.1954.134.75**

2nd quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo. Registered in 1954. Donated by S. Edkins.

Among the Mangbetu and their neighbours, these horns were associated with the figure of the chief. They resounded during times of war or were played in ceremonial and dance orchestras.



**'Fly whisk' scepter (Kuba) - EO.1951.31.129**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo. Registered in 1951. Acquired from R. Blondiau.

The knob on this sceptre is in the form of a throne. This indicates that the owner must be of a high rank.



**‘Pseudo-olifant’ type regalia-charm (Songye-Eki? Songye-Ilande?) - EO.o.o.24182**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo. Registered in 1919. Collected by A. de Macar (in 1888?).

Objects such as this are very rare and valuable. They belonged to local chiefs who were involved in the trade in slaves and ivory on behalf of Arabo-Swahili networks. They disappeared around the same time as the networks ceased to exist.



**‘Pseudo-olifant’ type regalia-charm (Songye-Kalebwe) - EO.o.o.24181**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo. Registered in 1919. Collected by A. de Macar (in 1888?).



**Transverse horn (Luluwa) - MO.o.o.31988**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo. Registered in 1930. Anonymous donation.

Among the eastern Luba, neighbours of the Luluwa, certain 19th-century chiefs possessed ivory side-blown horns. These served as attributes of power and perhaps also as power figures (*nkishi*).



**Sceptre (Kongo culture/Acquired from the Yombe) -**

EO.o.o.43708

1st quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Registered in 1947. Collected by J. Seha (1930s).

This type of sceptre was supplied with a magical charge. Its traces are still clearly visible on this specimen. The seated figure represents the chief. Between his teeth, he holds the ritual root *munkwiza*, which has supernatural properties. At his feet is a high-ranking woman who has been strangled and whose neck has been broken. This is probably a reference to stories in which the ruler must prove his superhuman nature by having one of his close family members executed.



**Gikhoko pendant (Central Pende) - EO.o.o.36524**

2nd quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Registered in 1936. Collected by J. Hofman (1910s-1930s).

This is probably a representation of the *fumu* (chief) or *pumbu* (justice bearer) mask. They are both recognisable by their hair-style with black raffia tips.



**Gikhoko pendant (Central Pende) - EO.o.o.36584**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory? RD Congo.  
Registered in 1936. Collected by J. Hofman (1910s-1930s).

This is probably a representation of the *fumu* mask (the chief) or *pumbu* (the bringer of justice).



**Gikhoko pendant (Central Pende) - EO.o.o.36554**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Registered in 1936. Collected by J. Hofman (1910s-1930s).

The special form of the protuberances in the hair of this *gikhoko* distinguish it from the three other specimens. Perhaps this is a representation of the *ginginga* mask that did not have the three-pointed hairstyle of a chief, but a beautiful feathered headdress.



**Gikhoko pendant (Central Pende) - EO.o.o.36522**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Registered in 1936. Collected by J. Hofman (1910s-1930s).

*Ikhoko* (singular *gikhoko*) are miniature ivory replicas of masks. Boys usually received one after their initiation during the *mukanda* circumcision rite.

*Givule* is the spiritual principle that animates every living being. In the matrilineal system (in which a child becomes a member of the mother's lineage group) it is passed on by an uncle on the mother's side, to the nephew that he regards as his heir. All ethnographic data indicate that, for the young *mukanda* initiate, the *gikhoko* pendant officially seals the transmission of the life principle from one generation to another. The *gihhoko* also protected the initiated boy against every attack on his *givule* for the rest of his life.



**Handle of *mwala*? (staff of chiefly authority) (Kakongo)**

- EO.1979.1.72

18th century. Elephant ivory. Angola. Registered in 1979. Former collection of KMKG-MRAH. Collected by E. Darveville (1930s).



**Handle of *mwala* (staff of chiefly authority) (Woyo) -**

EO.1979.1.71

18th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo. Registered in 1979. Former collection of KMKG-MRAH. Collected by E. Darveville in 1933 from chief Pedro Diamante.

The *mwala* staff was one of the attributes of the *mfumu* (chiefs). It is a symbol of authority and is comparable to a sceptre.

It often had an anthropomorphic or cephalomorphic handle sculpted in wood, ivory, or – more rarely – cast in metal.



**Figurine-pendant (Hungaan) - EO.o.o.19988**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo. Registered in 1917. Collected before 1897.

These Hungaan figurines were called *djendere* or *konda-konda*. They were worn as a pendant, some by women, others by important men. The figurines had an apotropaic (protective) function and promoted female fertility. They illustrated these problems from the specific perspective of death and rebirth. Among the Hungaan, death is nothing more than a stage in the rebirth of the soul. The iconography of these delicate figurines undoubtedly refers to this reincarnation cycle.

This specimen appears to combine the foetal position with the prominent belly of a pregnant woman and the death pose – the deceased used to be buried with their legs bent.



**Figurine-pendant (Hungaan) - EO.o.o.30360**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Registered in 1928. Collected before 1897.

This type of figurine belonged to certain important men. They wore it as a pendant, perhaps to ensure collective fertility.



**Pendant (Hungaan) - EO.o.o.16707**

2nd quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Registered in 1914. Collected before 1897.

This very rare pendant consists of two mirrored faces, one with eyes open, one with eyes closed. This opposition may indicate the transition from death to reincarnation.



**Tobacco container (Tshokwe? Pende?) - EO.1960.29.1**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Hippopotamus ivory?  
RD Congo. Registered in 1960. Acquired from E. Beer.

Ivory tobacco or snuff boxes were called *tesa ya makany* by the Tshokwe, *kwy* by some central Pende and *shinga* by Lunda and Pende from Kasai.

The Tshokwe and Lunda specimens have an elegant slight hour-glass shape, while Pende snuff boxes are completely cylindrical. Among the Lunda, the leather stoppers are hemispherical, while those of the Tshokwe and Pende are disc-shaped. Thus, this delightful, lightly curved tobacco box with a disc-shaped stopper probably originates from the Tshokwe.



***Mukisi muhasi* bust-pendant (Eastern Luba)** - EO.o.o.o.23124  
4th quarter of the 19th century. Warthog ivory. RD Congo.  
Registered in 1919. Acquired from F.L. Michel.



***Mukisi muhasi* figurine-pendant (Eastern Luba)** -  
EO.1980.2.559  
2nd quarter of the 19th century. Hippopotamus ivory?  
RD Congo. Registered in 1980. Bequest of J. Walschot,  
through H. Van Geluwe.



***Mukisi muhasi* bust-pendant (Eastern Luba)** -  
EO.1960.39.1010  
3rd quarter of the 19th century. Hippopotamus ivory.  
RD Congo. Registered in 1960. Donated by the Amis du  
Musée.

*Mikisi mihasi* figurines (singular *mukisi muhasi*) are associated with rites that aim at maintaining peaceful relations between certain deceased and their close relatives.

## ‘DON’T YOU FIND IT BEAUTIFUL?’

This pot tells a story — the story of a meeting, at the beginning of the 20th century, between Alphonse de Calonne-Beaufaict, a Belgian electrical engineer, and a Kango potter from the village of Veregwange.

In his book *Études bakango* (1912) de Calonne-Beaufaict describes the creative process of the ceramicist as follows:

‘Under her shaking hands, the clay formed itself into vases of various shapes, but almost always outlined by an unwavering and elegant curve [...] I would like to draw them, one by one, these *mbeka* (pots), which I had seen all upstream Bakango using.’

De Calonne-Beaufaict was fascinated by the making of these pots, and he asked the ceramicist why she decorated them so exquisitely. Was the ethnographer lurking in the heart of the engineer hoping for an answer that hinted at rites and images infused with a deeper meaning?

The old woman’s answer soon brought him out of his reverie. ‘My mother always did it this way. I have already made so many. Don’t you find it beautiful?’





***Belima* cooking pot (Kango) - EO.o.o.13905**

Early 20th century, RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Collected by A. Hutereau (1910s).

## DECORATIVE OR FUNCTIONAL?

It is often thought that all figurative sculpture from Africa is associated with ritual or magical powers. But we must beware of making such generalizations, in Africa or elsewhere. This becomes clear if we draw a comparison with the war helmets or ceremonial helmets of European Renaissance princes. While they are often adorned with symbols of war, such as mythological heroes and gods like Hercules or Mars, such likenesses give the helmet no special powers. They are primarily intended as decoration, and perhaps also to make the iconography fit with the function of the object. Similar cases exist in Africa.

This is clear from this small selection of Congolese knives with an anthropomorphic handle. While some were indeed associated with a magical power, others are purely decorative, or simply highlight the social status of the owner.



**Dagger (Zande? Ababua?) - EO.o.o.574-2**

Late 19th century. Elephant ivory. Northeastern RD Congo. Registered in 1907.

The refinement of this purely decorative sculpted handle is meant to emphasize the status and wealth of the weapon's owner.



**Dagger (Zande? Nzakara?) - EO.o.o.574-4**

Late 19th century. Northeastern RD Congo. Registered in 1907.

The refinement of this purely decorative sculpted handle is meant to emphasize the status and wealth of the weapon's owner.



**Dagger (Mangbetu) - EO.o.o.14996**

Late 19th century. Wood (*Alstonia* sp.). Northeastern RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Collected by F. Wilmet (1910s).

The refinement of this purely decorative sculpted handle is meant to emphasize the status and wealth of the weapon's owner.



**Knife (Songye) - EO.o.o.24178**

2nd half of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1919. Collected by A. de Macar (1880s).

The anthropomorphic handle of this knife is not at all decorative. In the skull and the belly are cavities into which magical substances were put — an indication that the handle functioned as a sculpted *nkishi* (amulet). Such ‘fetish knives’ also existed in other cultures, such as those of the Luluwa or the Kongo.



**Charm (Luluwa) - EO.o.o.21428**

Late 19th-early 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1917. Former collection of H. Pareyn.

The knife blade suggests otherwise, but this is not a weapon with a decorative, anthropomorphic handle. It is probably a very unusual variant of a type of figurine that was used in the *bwanga bwa Cibola* fertility cult. Certain amulets associated with this cult were monoxyle figurines (produced from one piece of wood) in the form of a female bust that ended in a wooden point. Here, this point has been replaced by a blade.



**Knife (Central or eastern Luba) - EO.1954.49.1**

2nd half of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1954. Acquired from E. Beer.

Knives with a detailed blade and a head-shaped knob were destined for leading Luba figures. They were individual luxury objects, but it remains highly uncertain whether, in addition, the sculpted head also possessed a ‘magical power’.

Decorative weapons made by Luba blacksmiths had a certain popularity. This knife, the work of a Luba artist, may have been acquired from a Luluwa owner.

## BEAUTY IS A FORCE

In some cultures, the beauty of a work clearly contributes to its ritual power. The most striking examples undoubtedly include the statues (*mpingu*) that the Luluwa use for two rites: *bwanga bwa Bwimpe/Bulenga* and *bwanga bwa Cibola*.

The purpose of the *bwanga bwa Cibola* rite is primarily to ensure a successful pregnancy and to encourage the reincarnation of an ancestor in the newborn. The *bwanga bwa Bwimpe/Bulenga* rite serves to strengthen the fertility of women and to watch over the health of the young child.

The aesthetic perfection of the figurines that are associated with the two *bwanga* clearly underlines the apotropaic (protective) role of physical and, by extension, moral beauty. From the viewpoint of the Luluwa, a beautiful person, in the two senses of the word, is better protected against magical and supernatural attacks.

Paradoxically, sorcerers could be tempted to target exceptionally beautiful children out of envy or jealousy.

Moreover, among the Luluwa, just as among the Luba, the beauty of a statue could be an invitation to the ancestors to seek rapprochement with the living.



***Bwanga bwa Cibola statuette (Luluwa)*** - EO.o.o.9446

Early 20th century. Wood (*Crossopteryx febrifuga*). RD Congo. Registered in 1912. Donated by the *Expansion colonial*.

Pieces like these that taper to a point were meant to be worn on the belt on some occasions.



***Bwanga bwa Cibola statue (Luluwa)*** - EO.o.o.43852

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

The style of this figurine has influenced the work of Mulumba Tshiwaka, a well-known artist from the first quarter of the 20th century. Some Luluwa communities still had vivid memories of him in 2011.



***Bwanga bwa Cibola statue (Luluwa)*** - EO.o.o.43858

Late 2nd quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Hymenocardia acida*). RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).



***Bwanga bwa Cibola statue (Luluwa)* - EO.o.o.43859**

1st quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Crossopteryx febrifuga*). RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

Powerful, round calves, a long neck, and a bulging forehead: these are some of the beauty criteria of the Luluwa.



***Bwanga bwa Bwimpe/Bulenga statuette (Luluwa)* - EO.o.o.43214**

1st quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Crossopteryx febrifuga*). RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

The terms *bulenga* and *bwimpe* are equivalent. They both relate to physical and moral perfection: beauty and goodness. This beauty is definitely not innate; it is a laborious, sophisticated beauty that is the result of scarifications, hairstyles, or adornments (such as ivory pellets that are attached to a loincloth).



***Bwanga bwa Bwimpe/Bulenga statuette (Luluwa)* - EO.o.o.26635**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1922. Collected by Mr. Rusmont.

This figurine almost certainly held a cup in its left hand –characteristic of many *bwanga bwa Bwimpe/Bulenga* figurines.

The staff, a power symbol, refers to a very specific healing rite to which the eldest daughter of an important chief could submit. The rite was aimed at ending the influence of an angry spirit. Afterwards, the woman was ready to play a genuine political role.

## A DISEMBODIED FACE

Frequently, the term mask suggests nothing more than an object, often sculpted, that covers and transforms the face of the wearer. This image is reinforced by the fact that numerous African masks that reached Europe, had been stripped of a part of their material (costume, accessories) and immaterial (dances, songs) identity. Here, we present three Tshokwe *cihongo* masks, which show how selective or, indeed, how meticulous collectors were in dealing with this material identity.





***Cihongo/tshihongo mask (Tshokwe)* - EO.o.o.43146**

1st quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Schinziophyton rautanenii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

The *cihongo* mask represents a powerful and venerable male spirit. It was mainly present at the initiation (*mukanda*) of the sons of chiefs. It is characterized by an imposing, arched head-dress and a very special fibre skirt. In this case, the collector was only interested in the sculpted part of the mask.



***Cihongo/tshihongo mask (Tshokwe)* - EO.1967.63.51**

2nd quarter of the 20th century. Angola. Registered in 1967. Former collection of KMKG-MRAH. Collected by R. Verly (1940s).

This mask was collected without its costume, but with the very specific headdress.



***Cihongo/tshihongo mask (Tshokwe)* - EO.o.o.33780**

ca. 1930. RD Congo. Registered in 1931. Collected by G. de Witte in 1931.

The herpetologist Gaston-François de Witte collected many Tshokwe masks for the museum, always with their complete costume. Many of them were made of barkcloth smeared with wax or resin and then stretched onto a frame. In the 1930s, this type of mask was less popular, because European collectors were mainly interested in wooden masks.

## DOMESTIC TALENT FOR THE FOREIGN MARKET

Sculptors such as Niama Loemba or Futi Daniel were more or less trained to produce work for Westerners, but that was not the rule. Several sculptors who produced art for Europeans were, first and foremost, recognised — and highly appreciated — by their Congolese clientele. Two examples are Makosa and Kaseya Ntambwe.



### **Mini-*niombo* (Bwende) - EO.0.0.35754**

Artist: Makosa

1930s? RD Congo. Registered in 1934. Collected by missionary E. Karlman.

The last Bwende producer of *niombo* (sarcophagi made of fabric) was named Makosa. He had dressed the remains of many prestigious chiefs. Because he acted as an informant for missionaries who were obsessed with ethnography, he soon realised just how much Europeans were interested in these surprising funeral ceremonies. From the start of the 20th century, he made several copies of *niombo* for them. His true

genius, however, was in knowing how to make faithful replicas in miniature: these were easy to transport, and he asked a lot of money for them.

But Makosa also had other reasons to focus on Europeans. After he converted to Christianity in 1893, traditional authorities in Kingoyi wondered if he was still allowed to make *niombo*. As a result, he lost part of his local clientele.

Moreover, in a rapidly changing world, *niombo* funeral rituals fell into disuse. By working for Europeans, Makosa could continue to express his talent and maintain his reputation as an artist.



### ***Kishikishi* post figure (Pende) - EO.1950.25.1**

Artist: Kaseya Ntambwe

1940s. RD Congo. Registered in 1950. Donated by Father J. Vanhamme.

*Kishikishi*, large female statues, used to adorn the roofs of the houses of chiefs. More than power symbols, they were genuine ritual objects that were meant to protect both the chief and society.

In the 1940s, Kaseya Ntambwe developed a new model of *kishikishi*: a mother carrying her child on her hips. Perhaps the artist was inspired by the iconography of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child,

but his style was very different, with more realistic proportions and softer features. The statues were popular with both Pende chiefs and European colonizers.

Later, Ntambwe was the facilitator of one of the 'Ateliers Sociaux d'Art Indigène du Sud-Kasaï', founded by Robert Verly in the 1950s. But before he started to produce studio pieces and even serial work for European clients, his ritual art enjoyed recognition at the heart of the traditional Pende universe.



**Statue (Pende) - EO.1953.74.5390**

Artist: Kaseya Ntambwe

1950s. RD Congo. Collected by A. Maesen (1950s). Registered in 1955.

Although Ntambwe's very personal style is evident in this work, produced in the context of the 'Ateliers Indigènes de Verly', it still lacks power. This sculptural weakness can be ascribed not only to serial production, but also to the fact that the artist lacked ritual conviction at the time that he made such pieces.

What is interesting, however, is that this object – originally intended for European buyers – attracted the attention of a local chief, who placed it for ritual use in his *kibulu* (house of a Pende chief). Before white people encouraged artists to produce this type of anthropomorphic statue, statues on a base were rare. They were thought to cause misfortune and were reserved for chiefs or the ritual bearers of talking sticks. The production of numerous similar objects in Ntambwe's studio indicates that with the emergence of 'modernity', these anthropomorphic statues gradually lost their menacing nature.

## A FACTORY FOR ‘GOOD’ ARTISTS

In 1935, the *Association des Amis de l'Art Indigène* (AAI) was founded in Belgian Congo. A year later, the AAI set up a Museum for Native Life in Leopoldville, and ran workshops throughout the country to support Congolese artists. The workshops enabled hundreds of artists to earn a living and to concentrate on a traditional activity ‘that would be clumsy for us to allow to disappear’. The museum’s aim was ‘to preserve Congo’s artistic past and to give young artists the opportunity to be inspired by ancestral motifs’.

But the Belgian visitors to the workshops, such as Robert Verly, by no means understood all the symbolic and aesthetic dimensions of traditional art, which they often labelled ‘nègreries’, ‘negro work’. The AAI denied that it interfered with the artists’ creative process, but in reality, it added its own artistic preferences — more ‘classical’ proportions, for example, and less static figures.

The same phenomenon occurred within the workshops that were founded by Christian missions.

The colonial regime removed Congolese sculptors from their traditional environment, but paradoxically, it also stimulated them to limit themselves to these same traditions in their work. They were not even allowed to consult works about art in the rest of the world. This way, they were twice deprived of a code with which they could have interpreted their new surroundings — a hybrid environment in which they, as it were, were caught between two worlds. The majority of these artists, therefore, produced objects that, somewhere between academicism and tradition, seem robbed of their soul, and cut off from the intimate dialogue that an artist necessarily conducts with his oeuvre.



**‘Academic’ bust sculpted in Bas-Congo** - EO.1953.74.962

Artist: Niamba Loemba

Early 1950s. RD Congo. Registered in 1953. Collected by A. Maesen (1950s).

Several sculptors from Lower Congo produced realistic busts in an academic style.

These were particularly popular with Europeans: in the 1950s, they achieved higher prices than so-called ‘ethnographic’ masks and statues. Academic-style busts by artists such as Ntonio, Niamba Loemba, or Futi Daniel fetched between 120 and 350 Belgian francs (21-63 euros). Around the same time, a *bandunga* mask by a skilled traditional sculptor such as Lucas Lobata (a specimen is shown in the display case) could go for nearly 50 francs (9 euros).

Europeans were usually charged higher prices than local buyers.



**Bandunga mask (Woyo)** - EO.1953.74.916

Artist: Lucas Lobata

2nd quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1953. Collected by A. Maesen (1950s).

In the 20th century, *bandunga* masks were mainly worn at purification rituals and incantations against natural disasters. They also played a role during the funerals of dignitaries, the enthronement of chiefs, and the arrival of important visitors. Each mask had its own name. This specimen was known as *mfutshi* (‘inertia’ or ‘delay’), a reference to a proverb: ‘He is late because he had to sew his rags together first!’ The proverb refers to people who make excuses to avoid unpleasant situations, as clothes in tatters are impossible to sew well.



**Genre scene (funeral) - EO.1978.25.14**

Artist: Mayele

Late 1930s. RD Congo. Registered in 1978. Bequest of the Daco family.

The work of the sculptor Mayele was greeted with admiration in 1939 by the Amis de l'Art Indigène. But despite his evident craftsmanship, viewed through a contemporary lens, Mayele's compositions seem surprisingly

similar to what we now call tourist art. The skill with which he constructs 'tradition', and the compositions with different moving figures with rather Western proportions, were, in the eyes of the AAI, the artist's own choice. But his style, and in particular the 'refined physique' of his sculpture, responded perfectly to the preferences of his white patrons — even though they themselves claimed that they protected Mayele 'from every influence that went against the natural development of his art'.

## THE MUSEUM'S RESERVES: UNITY AND DIVERSITY, OLD AND NEW, TRUE AND FALSE

Characteristic of this museum is that, from the 1897 Brussels -Tervuren World's Fair until today, it has built up a collection containing extensive series of ethno-typological objects. What at first glance can seem like nothing more than an accumulation of objects, is, in reality, an indispensable corpus for art historical research.

For example, the museum has acquired hundreds of *mankishi* (ritual statues), which cover a vast area both culturally and historically. The pieces originate from numerous subgroups of Songye peoples, each with their own ritual and artistic characteristics. Some were made in the 18th century, others date from the 1950s. This rich collection enables scientists to study the evolution of styles, materials, and tools on the basis of as many objects as possible, and to examine which ritual context the objects were used in.

In addition to these authentic pieces, the Songye collection also contains objects for the tourist trade as well as forgeries, from different periods. This additional corpus may not be well-loved, but its study provides insight into a form of art production that focuses on Europeans, forms part of a market economy, yields profit, and also provides a livelihood for many Africans.

Unlike other museums around the world, the RMCA has not built its collections around the search for the absolute masterpiece. Such a premise would have benefited our museum's reputation, but would have been disastrous for scientific research.





**Authentic *nkishi* statuette (Songye-Eki? Songye-Tempa?) -**

EO.o.o.43295

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Crossopteryx febrifuga*). RD Congo. Registered in 1946. Collected by T. Fourche (1930s).

Do the copper nails that stud this *nkishi* (ritual statue) protect against smallpox, as a scientist had suggested on the basis of a similar Songye figure? What is certain is that in the 1980s, a smallpox epidemic that caused numerous victims raged in the Songye region.



**Authentic *nkishi* statuette (Songye of the Lusambo region) -**

EO.o.o.3673

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Alchornea* sp.). RD Congo. Registered in 1912. Collected before 1897.

The sideways head of this *nkishi* may refer to the way that some *bandoshi* sorcerers were believed to wring the necks of their victims. This type of figurine could, then, protect its owner from such a threat. But the remarkable figurine, with its very rare posture, is still distinguished by other peculiarities. The quarter turn of the head relative to the shoulders forms the start of a continuous torsion movement in the whole body, so that the shoulder blades are no longer in line with the buttocks.



**Authentic *nkishi* statue (Songye-Sanga) - EO.1948.18.1**

1st quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Vitex madiensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1948. Donated by S. Edkins. Collected before 1935.

This three-horned *nkishi* has striking eyes, which consist of convex nails. Maybe they refer to 'Galago with the protruding eyes', the small primate that, according to the creation myth of Songye-Eki peoples, produced the first humans. The details of the myth were recited to novices of the *Bukishi* society. Moreover, each eye is made of a different metal. The bright grey of the iron and the red of the copper may indicate a link to the characteristic white-red symbolism of the *Bukishi* society.

The *Bukishi* society was mainly concerned with questions of a social and legal nature. It was also involved, albeit less frequently, when a new age group was ready for initiation, when a new chief was appointed, or during circumcisions.



### **Inauthentic statue - RENO.96**

4th quarter of the 20th century.

This statue is a forgery of mediocre quality. The woodcarver, probably not Songye, has been inspired in a very folkloristic and grotesque way by the classic shapes of an authentic *nki-shi*. The horn, the rusted ornamental nails, and the worn-out loincloth lead the naïve buyer to believe that he has acquired an authentic, old object, which was used in rituals – just like the specimen with the three horns in this display case.

The trade in non-authentic Congolese artefacts took off in the second half of the 20th century. Unlike in the first half of the century, it is no longer exceptional to be confronted with objects that are supposed to come from a particular Congolese culture, but which, in reality, were made by someone who does not belong to that culture, or does not even come from Congo. For example, we know that since the 1960s, so-called Congolese objects have been manufactured in Cameroon.



### **Inauthentic statue (Songye-Tempa) - EO.1951.36.3**

2nd quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Vitex* sp.). RD Congo. Acquired from H. Elias. Registered in 1951.

In the first half of the 20th century, and even in the last quarter of the 19th century, Songye woodcarvers made statues that served as exotic souvenirs for colonials and whites in transit. This object belongs to that category.

The execution of this object closely matches what a Songye customer could expect of a statue destined to become a *nkishi* (ritual statue), at least if you disregard details such as the varnish layer and the mannered representation of the hair. This statue is not fake, but a product for tourists. It was not the woodcarver's intention to make a forgery of a ritual object, like the other non-authentic statues in this display case. He simply carved a Songye-style statue that was destined to play a purely decorative role in a European interior.

## CLEANED WORKS

The *nkisi* of the various Kongo peoples (Yombe, Woyo, Kakongo, Vili, among others) belong to the most well-known Congolese artefacts. The museum keeps numerous specimens in its collections.

A *nkisi* consists of a carrier – often a sculpture – and different *bilongo* (magical charges), which mainly originate from the realm of animals, plants, or minerals.

The study of these *bilongo* can help to better determine the ritual role of the *nkisi*.

Some European owners, however, especially in the first three decades of the 20th century, cleaned their *nkisi* to rid them of all ‘hideous and dirty’ aspects. Others collected non-consecrated sculptures, whose wood was still immaculate. Sometimes, European aesthetic sensibilities even led to the *nkisi* being waxed to give the wood more shine — as if it was a piece of furniture!

Such cleaning practices emphasized the statue’s form, which was sometimes masked by the added *bilongo*, but they were highly detrimental to the scientific study of the works.

European tastes subsequently changed: henceforth, interest went to ‘authentic and ritually intact pieces’, including all the charges that were part of it. That led to yet another practice: the adding of elements that had nothing to do with the original piece, in order to produce a highly charged work.



**Statuette (Yombe? Woyo?) - EO.o.o.32390**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Alstonia congensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1930. Donated by the Allart family.

In the 1880s, Dr. J.-B. Allart acquired this work from a sculptor before he could sell it to a *nganga*, a ritual expert. The object shows no traces of consecration, although it is ready to receive magic charges in the cavities in the stomach and skull.



**Statuette (Vili?) - EO.o.o.2912-11**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1911. Former collection of Mohonval.

This figurine had already been purchased before the artist had finished it. This can be seen by the unfinished decorations on the base and the absence of cavities for magical charges.

The roughly-fashioned arms, on the other hand, are no indication that the work was prematurely stopped. After the initiation by the *nganga* (ritual expert), some of these statues were covered with various materials, which hid the torso and the upper limbs. Many sculptors therefore paid less attention to the finishing of these body parts. That also happened sometimes with the top part of the skull, which in some *nkisi* had a resin-covered charge placed in it — although this was certainly not the case for this statue.



**Nkisi statuette (Yombe?) - EO.o.o.16688**

1st quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Crossopteryx febrifuga*). RD Congo. Registered in 1914.

Apart from its head being polished, this *nkisi* has undergone few changes between the moment it was used ritually and the moment that it was included in the museum's collections.



***Nkisi maphana statue (Woyo)*** - EO.o.o.33937

1st quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Canarium schweinfurthii*). RD Congo. Registered in 1932. Collected by Father L. Bittremieux (1920s?).

Nothing was changed about this *nkisi* between the moment that it was used ritually and the moment that it was included in the museum's collections.



***Nkisi statuette (Woyo)*** - EO.1979.1.19

3rd quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1979. Former collection of KMKG-MRAH.

This *nkisi*'s charges are well preserved, but the face has been polished by one of its European owners.



***Nkisi statuette (Yombe)*** - EO.1953.85.8

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Crossopteryx febrifuga*). RD Congo. Registered in 1953. Donated by A. Wibier.

The skull and stomach charges of this *nkisi* were removed in Europe. Subsequently, the wood was polished to give it a 'Bakelite' patina — something that Westerners liked to look at.



***Nkisi statuette (Yombe? Woyo?)* - EO.o.o.24658**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1920. Collected by J. de Briey (1910s).

Some statues – this one, for example – had the charges in their stomach and back removed by European collectors, but not those from the skull. That is because the skull charges on Kongo *nkisi* generally look like a little hat or Turkish turban. This suits the character well, and does not harm the sculptural balance.

Other items in this display case demonstrate how the removal of the skull charge has not always been a successful procedure: for example, an unfinished skull is left exposed.



***Nkisi statuette (Yombe)* - EO.o.o.16681**

2nd quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1914.

The beautifully shaped body of this *nkisi* has a sculptured *chinzembe* around its shoulders – a cloak that belonged to the chief. In order enhance its form, the magic charges have been removed from its stomach and skull.

## MUTILATED WORKS

The objects that you see here are Luba prestige staffs. Some have been sawn by Europeans. The reason for this mutilation is simple and well-known: to keep the sculptured part (often a head, or a full-length figure) and remove the ‘annoying’ part (the shaft, whether decorated with geometric motifs or not). This now rarely applied ‘aesthetic’ intervention to transform the staff into a statuette harmed the study of the object. The allegedly less important parts of the staff contain a wealth of iconographic information, and contribute to a better understanding of the ritual meaning and the stylistic identification of the piece.



**Kibango staff-sceptre (Eastern Luba) - EO.o.o.14372**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Pterocarpus tinctorius*). RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Collected by H.A. Bure (1900s).

*Kibango* sceptre staffs such as this one were power symbols for chiefs and dignitaries. Just like the *misupi* sceptre staff in this display case, the engraved or sculptured elements on the handle form a visual language that tells, for example, the history of a chieftdom or an ancestry story. However, the shapes and motifs were mainly interpreted by scientists who worked with central Luba peoples, while these items were made by eastern Luba peoples.



**Misupi staff-sceptre (Eastern Luba) - EO.o.o.34585**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Pterocarpus tinctorius*). RD Congo. Registered in 1932. Collected by C. Brasseur (1890s).

*Misupi* sceptre staffs owe their name to their shape — *misupi* means oar. They refer to specific myths and belonged to chiefs or dignitaries who played a role in trade and transport over water, both on rivers and lakes.





**Severed top of staff-sceptre (Eastern Luba)** - EO.1951.9.6  
1st quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1951. Acquired from G. Chauveau.

By removing the non-figurative part of this staff, one of its European owners has also amputated an important part of the iconography. Was this a *misupi* sceptre staff, or a *kibango*?



**Severed top of staff-sceptre (Eastern Luba)** - HO.1954.72.86  
18th century? RD Congo. Registered in 1954. Former collection of H.M. Stanley (1880s?).

## APPLIED ART

Work that Europeans sometimes rather disparagingly call ‘artisanal’ in fact conceals a technical expertise, inventiveness, and artistic sense that are often ignored. Here, you can truly appreciate the exceptional techniques and handling of materials by men and women from Congo and a number of neighbouring countries. They have transformed raw earth, simple fibres, and metal ores into masterpieces.

Except for rare cases, no two pots, baskets, or shields are alike. Every craftsman or -woman wanted to prove themselves by transforming or improving on the work of their predecessors, while at the same time preserving the general stylistic lines that were appreciated by the whole village or region.

It should be noted that many of the objects in this display case did not belong to commoners. They were made for the elite with great pride and attention to detail by the best *fundi* (craftsmen).

These seemingly ordinary objects were in fact mostly intended for important people. They were sometimes used for specific rituals, but more than that they served to highlight the social status of their owner. In the same way, wealthy Belgians buy their wine glasses – everyday ware – from Val-Saint-Lambert or have their hunting rifle custom-made at Lebeau-Courally.

Many of the objects that we show here shed new light on cultures whose art is little known in Europe – often because they did not make objects that were regarded as ‘typical’ African art such as masks or sculptures.



**Sickle-weapon (Gbaya) - EO.o.o.9389**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Central African Republic.  
Registered in 1912.



**Dagger (Mondjombo) - EO.o.o.30322**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in  
1928. Donated by Baron Lambert.



**Shield (Topoke) - EO.1957.18.20**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in  
1957. Acquired from M. Dumoulin.

This type of shield is very rarely found in museum collections.



**Throwing knife (Gobu) - EO.1959.28.5**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1959. Collected by V. de Crombrughe de Looringhe in 1895.



**Sword (So) - EO.o.o.32903**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1931. Donated by Captain Dineur.



**Soro throwing knife (Mabo) - EO.o.o.26109**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1921.

Throwing knives are among the most surprising weapons of Central Africa. Because of their multiple blades, the form of which differs from culture to culture, and their weight, they are lethal projectiles. The basic models were used in battle, while the richly decorated versions served more often as ceremonial weapons or currency.



**Saola shield (Lendu)** - EO.1959.21.775

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1959. Donated by H.M. Léopold III.

This rather unusual type of shield protected the back when it was worn, and also served as a quiver.



**Broadsword (Songye-Eki)** - EO.1980.2.2003

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1980. Bequest of J. Walschot, through H. Van Geluwe.



**Dagger (Kusu)** - EO.0.0.24319

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1919. Collected by A. de Macar (1880s).

Blacksmiths from the Kusu and neighbouring Songye people were remarkable craftsmen who could create complex red copper incrustations in iron blades.



**Dagger (Songye-Sanga? Songye-Kalebwe?)** - EO.o.o.23858  
4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1919. Collected by O. Michaux (1890s).



**Navara shield (Popoi)** - EO.1959.21.781  
4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1959. Donated by H.M. Léopold III.

Several shields in this display case are part of a bequest of more than 1,300 objects from King Leopold III to the museum of Tervuren.

The Kings Leopold II, Albert I, Baudouin, and Queen Paola have also enriched the RMCA's ethnographic collection with their donations.



**Ngulu sickle-weapon (Doko)** - EO.o.o.29556  
4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1927?

This type of sickle sword was either an attribute of the chief, or an 'execution blade'. In any case, it references authority and the exercising of power.



**Hatchet (Yakoma) - EO.1980.2.2009**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1980. Bequest of J. Walschot, through H. Van Geluwe.



**Gbilija shield (Zande) - EO.1959.21.770**

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1959. Donated by H.M. Léopold III.

On some *gbilija* shields, throwing knives could be fastened on the inner side to a system located at the level of the wrist.



**Gorribet broadsword in sheath (Northern Kete) - EO.o.o.16129**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Donated by the Compagnie du Kasai.



**Sickle-weapon (Lobala) - EO.o.o.2806-2**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1911. Former collection of Daelman.



**Nenguma shield (Mangbetu) - EO.1951.25.4**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1951. Donated by A. Moeller de Laddersous.

These lightweight *nenguma* shields were occasionally exhibited during dances in honour of the leaders.



**Throwing knife (Mbuja) - EO.o.o.24814**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1920. Collected by J. Renkin in 1909.





**Bakonga belt (Nkundu)** - EO.1949.67.1

2nd quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1949. Donated by Madame Leurquin.

This type of belt, worn exclusively by women, became extremely rare among the Nkundu from the 1930s onwards. The pom-pom (*bonkoko*) could vary in colour from ochre to red.



**Musaka basket (Tshokwe)** - EO.1974.30.2

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1974. Donated by Madame De Busschere-Pieri, through the Amis du Musée.

These kinds of finely woven baskets were used to store *luku* – a paste made from manioc flour. *Luku* was also eaten out of them.



**Ntekk gourd (Ngend, Kuba culture)** - EO.1953.74.6744

2nd quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1956. Collected by A. Maesen (1950s).

These kinds of gourds were used to store water and especially palm wine. The engraved decorations were applied by women.



**Gaga filter (Barambo)** - EO.o.o.6905

Early 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1912. Collected by A. Hutereau (1910s).

This type of filter was used for brewing corn beer.



**Kipiringa basket (Soonde)** - EO.1953.74.3184

2nd quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1954. Collected by A. Maesen (1950s).

This type of basket was hung in the home. It was used for storing food or clothing.



**Asenga/likutu gourd with braided neck (So? Topoke? Bango?)** - EO.1959.48.96

1st quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1959. Acquired from Father A. Leysbeth.

This type of container was used for water, palm wine, or cosmetic oil.



**Pipe (Hima) - EO.o.o.22878**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1919. Collected by G. Bequaert?

The particular shape of the bowl recalls a bovine hoof and highlights the importance of livestock farming among the Hima.



**Pipe (Twa) - EO.1978.11.13**

3rd quarter of the 20th century. Rwanda. Registered in 1978. Collected by J.-B. Cuyppers (1970s).

You often see these pipes in photographs of Tutsi men from the 1930s-1940s. They were frequently made by Twa potters.

The generic name for pipes in Rwanda was inkono y' itâbi ('tobacco pot')



**Pipe (Lendu) - EO.o.o.12386**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Collected by F. Goffoel (1910s).



**Spoon-ladle (Bango) - EO.o.o.23199**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Registered in 1919. Acquired from F.L. Michel.



**Spoon (Makere?) - EO.1955.113.22**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Registered in 1955. Acquired from M. Dumoulin.



**Spoon-ladle (Bango) - EO.o.o.850**

4th quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. RD Congo.  
Registered in 1910. Collected by Mr. Coclet (1900s).

While ivory spoons were used in the rituals of certain cultures, such as the Lega, this was not the case among the Bango.



***Itoko* spoon (Nkundu) - EO.o.o.9008-2**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1912. Collected by Second Lieutenant Sondag (1910s).



**Spoon (Ngombe? Kote?) - EO.o.o.23192**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1919. Acquired from F.L. Michel.



**Spoon-ladle (Banja) - EO.o.o.20816**

3rd quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Former collection of H. Pareyn. Collected in 1901.



**Spoon (Yakoma? Ngbandi?) - EO.o.o.27520**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1924. Collected before 1897.



**Spoon (Yew? Bagbe?) - EO.o.o.27549**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1924. Collected before 1897.



**Bia mortar (Mongelima? Angba?) - EO.1973.6.5**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1973. Bequest of H. Schouteden.

This type of mortar was mainly used for crushing cola nuts or peppers. The powder from these stimulating substances was then dissolved in water, forming a kind of energy drink.



**Belibo pot (Mongelima) - EO.o.o.3052**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1911. Donated by C. Delhaise.

This recipient held cosmetic oil.



**Kede jar (Bangba) - EO.o.o.11799**

Early 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Collected by A. Hutereau (1910s).

This jar was used to store beer.



**Recipient (Bagbwe) - EO.o.o.5279-1**

Early 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1912. Collected by A. Hutereau (1910s).

This pot was intended for water or fermented beverages.



**Mutondo jar (Aushi)** - EO.1953.74.7580

Artist: Agatha Kiyembo

2nd quarter of the 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1955. Collected by A. Maesen (1950s).

The *mutondo* was used to make sorghum beer.



**Aba bottle (Madi)** - EO.o.o.11082

Early 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Collected by A. Hutereau (1910s).

The *aba* was used as a water bottle.



**'Marbled' dish (Sundi?)** - EO.1949.23.10

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1949. Collected by E. Darteville (1940s).

After the ceramic was fired for the second time, the still red-hot piece was placed in contact with a plant decoction. The chemical reaction that occurred with the contact resulted in the characteristic marbling.





**Recipient (Mundu) - EO.o.o.40325**

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1944. Donated by the family of J. Tercafs.

For water or fermented beverages.



**Akaro three-handled pot (Zande? Northern Ababua?) -**

EO.o.o.14026

Early 20th century. RD Congo. Registered in 1913. Collected by A. Hutereau (1910s).

The *akaro* contained water but was sometimes used for food.



***Murumba/nogetwe fabric piece (Mangbetu? Mbuti?) -***

EO.1951.25.64

4th quarter of the 19th century. Bark cloth (*Ficus* sp.).  
RD Congo. Registered in 1951. Donated by A. Moeller  
de Laddersous.

Mangbetu and Mbuti pygmy women decorated fabrics made from bark. The number of motifs and their variety and quality determined how beautiful and therefore how valuable the garment was.



***Naengo dugout-shaped pot (Makere) - EO.o.o.6001***

4th quarter of the 19th century. RD Congo. Registered in  
1912. Collected by A. Hutereau (1910s).

The *naengo* was used for water or palm wine.

**This temporary exhibition was organized for the opening of the Royal Museum  
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