

Lehman College Art Gallery

Contemporary Masks from the Kuba Region of Congo

Selections from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife
Service/Lehman College Study Collection

Curators: George A. Corbin (masks)
and Emily Marie Rekow (clothing)

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Contemporary Masks From the Kuba Region of Congo features forty objects from the Kuba region of the Democratic Republic of Congo in Central Africa. Exhibited in multiples in order to show stylistic variations around named types found at the courts of the Kuba king and at nearby tribal chieftainships, the exhibition provides an opportunity to study the workshop styles of masks made in the past decade by Kuba artists for sale to outsiders. Wall and object labels, wall texts, and contextual photographs offer background on the use of the masks within Kuba culture. The exhibition includes examples of Kuba textiles, beadwork belts and ornaments used on costumes. The masks presented in this exhibition are part of a study collection of eighty-seven art objects on extended loan to the Lehman College Art Department from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

Checklist

Display Case A : Masks: moshambwooy and mukyeem: The mask known as moshambwooy mushae (the "feathered" moshambwooy) is a royal mask representing Woot, the founding ancestor of the Kuba/Bushoong people. The Kuba king is buried wearing a moshambwooy mask. Mukyeem, is the chiefly version of the royal moshambwooy mask, and is made by the Kete, Ngongo, Ngeende, Shoowa and other peoples within the Kuba kingdom. It has a distinctive elephant trunk-like extension on top of the head, and is profusely covered with white cowrie shells, which evoke death during its use in funerary ceremonies.

1. Moshambwooy, Raffia, pigment, civet cat fur, clay, vegetal fibers, glass beads, 19"x12"x12 1/2" (FWS/LC#37)
2. Moshambwooy, Raffia, pigment, cowrie shells, civet cat fur, clay, vegetal fibers, glass beads, 13 1/2"x13"x10 1/2" (FSW/LC#35)
3. Moshambwooy, Raffia cloth, pigment, cowrie shells, civet cat fur, clay, vegetal fibers, glass beads, 14 1/2"x12 1/2"x11" (FWS/LC#36)
4. Mukyeem, Raffia cloth, cowrie shells, civet cat fur, clay, vegetal fibers, glass beads, 21 3/4"x15"x13 1/2" (FWS/LC#3)
5. Mukyeem, Raffia cloth, cowrie shells, civet cat fur, clay, vegetal fibers, glass beads, 23"x12"x10 1/2" (FWS/LC#5)
6. Mukyeem, Raffia cloth, cowrie shells, civet cat fur, clay, vegetal fibers, glass beads, 26"x18"x19" (FWS/LC#87)



Mukyeem mask, Kuba region of Congo, late 20th century

Display Case B: Masks: bwoom: The bwoom mask represents a pygmy spirit in the service of kings, chiefs and notables. Bwoom masks typically have a large bulbous forehead and often appear with the moshambwooy mask in royal ceremonies. They are found among the Kuba/Bushoong as well as the Kete, Ngeende, Pyaang, and Tshwa peoples.

7. Bwoom, Raffia cloth, wood, copper, pigment, cowrie shells, monkey fur, seed rattles, glass beads, 12 1/2"x9 1/2"x11 1/2" (FWS/LC#41)

8. Bwoom, Raffia cloth, wood, copper, pigment, cowrie shells, monkey fur, seed rattles, glass beads, 12 1/2"x8 3/4"x11" (FWS/LC#39)

9. Bwoom, Raffia cloth, wood, copper, pigment, cowrie shells, monkey fur, seed rattles, glass beads, 12 1/2"x10 1/2"x 12 1/2" (FWS/LC#12)

10. Bwoom, Raffia cloth, wood, copper, cowrie shells, monkey fur, elephant hair, seed rattles, glass beads, 12 1/2"x10"x11 1/2" (FWS/LC#11)

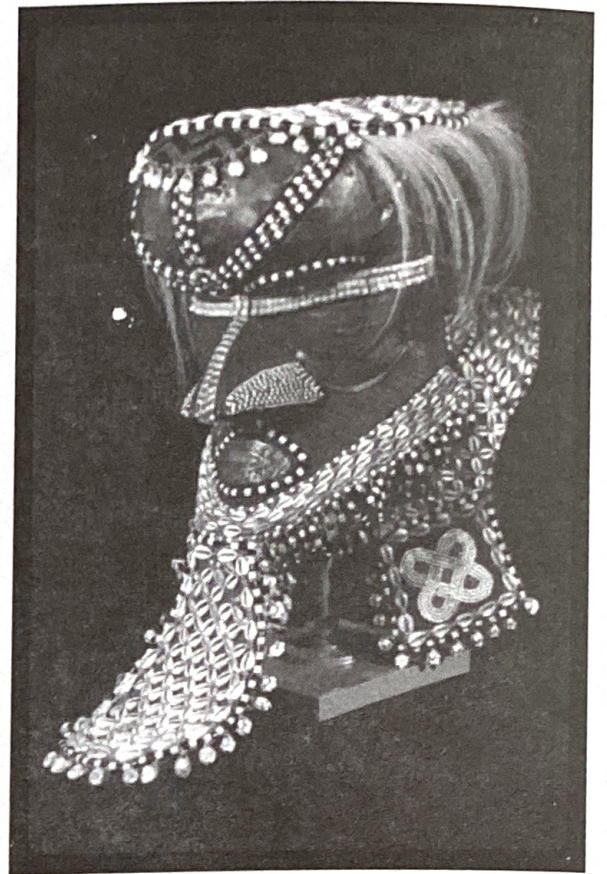
11. Bwoom, Raffia cloth, wood, copper, pigment, cowrie shells, animal skin, seed rattles, glass beads, 13"x9 1/2"x11" (FWS/LC#10)

12. Bwoom, Raffia cloth, wood, copper, pigment, cowrie shells, monkey fur, seed rattles, glass beads, 12 1/2"x10 1/2"x12" (FWS/LC#23)

13. Bwoom, Red pigmented cloth, cotton trade cloth, copper, white metal, wood, pigment, cowrie shells, monkey fur, glass beads, 14 1/2"x8"x12" (FWS/LC#38)

14. Bwoom, Raffia cloth, white metal, wood, pigment, cowrie shells, glass beads, 11 1/4"x9"x11 3/4" (FWS/LC#13)

15. Bwoom, Raffia cloth, wood, copper, pigment, cowrie shells, monkey fur, seed rattles, glass beads, 12 1/2"x9"x11" (FWS/LC#43)



Bwoom Mask, Kuba region of Congo, late 20th century

Display Case C: Masks: ngaady amwaash : The ngaady amwaash mask is a royal and chiefly mask representing Mweel, the incestuous sister of Woot, the founding ancestor of the Kuba. It performs along with the bwoom and moshambwooy (& mukyeem) masks in royal and chiefly ceremonies. This mask is said to have originated among the Kuba/Bushoong, however, today it is found widely among many other Kuba peoples.

16. Ngaady amwaash, Raffia cloth, fiber, wood, pigment, cowrie shells, glass beads, 10 3/4"x6"x4 1/2" (FWS/LC#47)

17. Ngaady amwaash, Raffia cloth, fiber, wood, pigment, animal skin with fur, cowrie shells, glass beads, 10 3/4"x8 1/2"x8" (FWS/LC#25)

18. Ngaady amwaash, Textile cloth, wood, pigment, cowrie shells, glass beads, 9 1/2"x6 1/4"x3 1/2" (FWS/LC#49)

Display Case D: Miscellaneous Masks: These masks represent types of contemporary masks from the Kuba/Bushoong and neighboring peoples (Ngeende, Lele, Luba, Pende, etc.) within and near the Kuba kingdom. They serve to illustrate some of the diverse mask styles made by artists recently for sale on the international art market. In general, the quality of these masks (with a few exceptions) is far lower than the contemporary moshambwooy, mukyeem, and bwoom masks seen in Cases A and B.

19. Kuba/Ngeende pwoom itok mask. The pwoom itok mask represents a wise old man and is used in initiation ceremonies as a dance mask. Wood, pigments, cloth, feathers 14"x13"x13", (FWS/LC# 88)

20. Kuba/Lele-style mask, unknown function. Wood, cloth, grasses, pigment, 16 1/4"x10"x9 1/2" (FWS/LC#28)

21. Kuba/Lele-style mask, unknown function. Wood, cloth, pigment, metal, cowrie shells, glass beads, animal fur, 11 1/2"x5 1/2"x2 3/4" (FWS/LC#34)

22. Kuba/Lele-style mask, unknown function. Wood, cloth, pigment, metal, cowrie shells, glass beads, animal fur, 10 3/4"x5 1/2"x3 3/4" (FWS/LC#29)

23. Kuba/Lele-style mask, unknown function. Wood, copper, feathers, pigment, cowrie shells, vegetal material, animal fur, 15"x8"x7 3/4" (FWS/LC#31)
24. Kuba/Luba-style royal or chiefly mask. Wood, pigment, cowrie shells, glass beads, metal, monkey fur, 19"x11"x12" (FWS/LC#33)
25. Western Pende, gitenga mask, used in initiation contexts and other ceremonies. Its round form is associated with the sun and its regenerative powers. 14 1/2"x13 1/2"x13 1/2" (without feathers) (FWS/LC#45)

Kuba Men's ceremonial skirts (mapel) : The six Kuba/Bushoong men's ceremonial skirts included in this exhibition are all similar in design. They are all composed of multiple woven raffia panels that have been dyed a similar purplish-red color. They all have small embroidery designs in the shape of florets covering the entire surface of the central panels, and they all have square or rectangular bark-cloth appliques composed of black and white triangles. They all have large borders with a bobble fringe and cowrie shells sewn onto their surface. Since these textile were probably refurbished for sale to the international art market, the cowrie shells and bark-cloth appliques were added to increase their salability.

26. Man's ceremonial skirt (mapel), raffia cloth, thread, cowrie shells, bark cloth, pigment, 55"x20 3/4" (FWS/LC#71)
27. Man's ceremonial skirt (mapel), raffia cloth, thread, cowrie shells, bark cloth, pigment, 53 1/4"x21" (FWS/LC#72)
28. Man's ceremonial skirt (mapel), raffia cloth, thread, fibers, cowrie shells, pigment, 53"x20 1/2" (FWS/LC#76)
29. Man's ceremonial skirt (mapel), raffia cloth, thread, fibers, cowrie shells, bark cloth, pigment, 56"x21" (FWS/LC#75)
30. Man's ceremonial skirt (mapel), raffia cloth, thread, fibers, cowrie shells, bark cloth, pigment, 47"x20 3/4" (FWS/LC#77)
31. Man's ceremonial skirt (mapel), raffia cloth, thread, fibers, cowrie shells, bark cloth, pigment, 48"x21" (FWS/LC#73)



Ngaady amwaash, Kuba region of Congo, late 20th century

Display Case E: Kuba Women's beaded belts (nkody-mu-ikup lakiing): The women's ceremonial belts included in this exhibition consist of a central section composed of beaded raffia cloth, and two long, rectangular side panels of woven raffia cloth embroidered with cowrie shells and beads. In the central section, many of the belts also have either one or two bead-covered knots.

32. Women's beaded belt. Raffia cloth, beads, cowrie shells, 36"x1 9/16"x1 3/4" (FWS/LC#57)
33. Women's beaded belt. Raffia cloth, beads, cowrie shells, 39 3/4"x1 1/2"x1 3/4" (FWS/LC#58)
34. Women's beaded belt. Raffia cloth, beads, cowrie shells, 45"x1 1/2"x2 1/2" (FWS/LC#60)
35. Women's beaded belt. Raffia cloth, beads, cowrie shells, 38 9/16"x1 1/2"x1 3/4" (FWS/LC#62)

Display Case E: Kuba beaded arm bands (dikdimyo): Beaded armbands are a ceremonial accessory that originated from the Kuba/Bushoong legend of the Mbwoom god. According to the legend, the only way the god was able to go up into the sky was by means of his wings. These armbands are meant to symbolize wings. The arm bands have two rectangular side panels embroidered with cowrie shells and a central beaded section. They also have a small beaded disk composed of concentric circles positioned directly in the center.

36. Beaded arm band. Raffia cloth, beads, cowrie shells, 15 3/4"x1 1/8" (FWS/LC#64)
37. Beaded arm band. Raffia cloth, beads, cowrie shells, 18 1/2"x1 3/8" (FWS/LC#66)

38. Beaded arm band. Raffia cloth, beads, cowrie shells, 20 1/8"x1 1/8" (FWS/LC#68)
39. Beaded arm band. Raffia cloth, beads, cowrie shells, 17 1/2"x1 1/4" (FWS/LC#69)
40. Beaded arm band. Raffia cloth, beads, cowrie shells, 19"x 1/3/8" (FWS/LC#70)

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