

# African Art

## TIME PERIOD: FROM PREHISTORIC TIMES TO THE PRESENT

Some chief African civilizations include:

Civilization	Time Period	Location
Great Zimbabwe	11th–15th Centuries	Zimbabwe
Bamileke	11th–21st Centuries	Cameroon
Benin	13th–19th Centuries	Nigeria
Luba	16th–21st Centuries	Congo
Kuba	17th–19th Centuries	Congo
Ashanti	17th–21st Centuries	Ghana
Chokwe	17th–21st Centuries	Congo
Yoruba	17th–21st Centuries	Nigeria
Baule	19th–21st Centuries	Côte d’Ivoire
Ibgo	19th–21st Centuries	Nigeria
Fang	19th–21st Centuries	Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea
Mende	19th–21st Centuries	Sierra Leone

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING: Human life began in Africa.

**Essential Knowledge:**

- Rock art is the earliest art form found in Africa. It depicts animals and human activity.
- The spreading Sahara caused migrations to southern Africa where the arts flourished.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING: African art is active and interactive with other art forms.

**Essential Knowledge:**

- African art is truly interdisciplinary, encompassing a wide variety of media, materials, and performances.
- African art addresses the spiritual world. It can be seen on everyday items, as well as on items associated with royalty.
- Art can be commissioned by a shaman or a worshiper. It is often used as part of an elaborate and prescribed ritual.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING: African art is meant to be used, not just viewed.

**Essential Knowledge:**

- Art permeates all important aspects of society. Rituals initiate coming of age, leadership, or family communion, and often have elements of contact with ancestors.
- Art objects are often manipulated and interpreted in rituals. Historic accomplishments are orally preserved by poets and historians who use objects to identify with their stories.
- Large leadership centers, as in Zimbabwe, show that Africans sometimes used monumental structures to mark settlements and territory.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING: Formerly thought of as static and primitive, today African art is seen as interactive with many cultures and ever changing.

**Essential Knowledge:**

- African history has been preserved in an oral tradition. Outsiders have used a written record of historical events.
- Collectors of African art have often ignored the usual data associated with art history: the names of artists and the dates of creation.
- African art has had a global impact.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Despite the incredible vastness of the African continent, there are a number of similarities in the way in which African artists create art, stemming from common beliefs they share.

Africans believe that ancestors never die and can be addressed; hence a sense of family and a respect for elders are key components of the African psyche. Many African sculptures are representations of family ancestors and were carved to venerate their spirits.

Fertility, both of the individual and the land, is highly regarded. Spirits who inhabit the forests or are associated with natural phenomenon have to be respected and worshipped. Sculptures of suckling mothers are extremely common; it is implied that everyone suckles from the breast of God.

Great ancient civilizations in Nubia, Egypt, and Carthage dominated politics in North Africa for centuries before empires began to develop in southern Africa, or much of the rest of the world.

African kingdoms came and went with regularity; more populous and dominant people occupied wide swaths of African territory. Strong indigenous states were established in Christian Aksum in present-day Ethiopia in the fourth century, and in the Luba Empire concentrated in central Africa beginning in the fifteenth century. In the twelfth century an important center evolved in southern Africa on the Zimbabwe plateau. Whatever the location, African states developed strong cultural traditions yielding a great variety of artistic expression.

African affairs were largely internal struggles because outsiders were held back by natural barriers like the Sahara Desert and the Indian Ocean. However, by the fifteenth century African politics became greatly complicated by Asian and European incursions on both the east and west coasts of the continent. In general, outsiders restricted themselves to coastal areas that afforded the most access to African goods, and few bothered with the interior of the continent. All this changed in the late nineteenth century when a large series of invasions called the “Scramble for Africa” divided the continent into colonies.

The era of European control spanned less than a century. Most states achieved independence in the 1960s, with the Portuguese colonies waiting until the 1970s. Colonization brought

African cultural affairs in direct contact with the rest of the world. Today African artists work both at home and abroad, using native and foreign materials, and marketing their work on a global scale.

### Patronage and Artistic Life

Since traditional Africans rely on an oral tradition to record their history, African objects are unsigned and undated. Although artists were famous in their own communities and were sought after by princes, written records of artistic activity stem principally from European or Islamic explorers who happened to encounter artists in their African journeys.

African artists worked on commission, often living with their patrons until the commission was completed. The same apprenticeship training that was current in Europe was the standard in Africa as well. Moreover, Africans also had guilds that promoted their work and helped elevate the profession.

As a rule, men were builders and carvers and were permitted to wear masks. Women painted walls and created ceramics. Both sexes were weavers. There were exceptions; for example, in Sierra Leone and Liberia women wore masks during important coming-of-age ceremonies.

The most collectable African art originated in farming communities rather than among nomads, who desired portability. To that end, the more nomadic people of East Africa in Kenya and Tanzania produced a fine school of body art, and the more agricultural West Africans around Sierra Leone and Nigeria achieved greatness with bronze and wood sculpture.

African art was imported into Europe during the Renaissance more as curiosities than as artistic objects. It was not until the early twentieth century that African art began to find true acceptance in European artistic circles.

### AFRICAN ARCHITECTURE

Traditional African architecture is built to be as cool and comfortable as a building could get in the hot African sun, and therefore is made of mud-brick walls and thatched roofs. While mud-brick is certainly easy and inexpensive to make, it has inherent problems. All mud-brick buildings have to be meticulously maintained in the rainy season; otherwise, much would wash away. Nonetheless, Africans build huge structures of mud-brick with horizontally placed timbers as maintenance ladders.

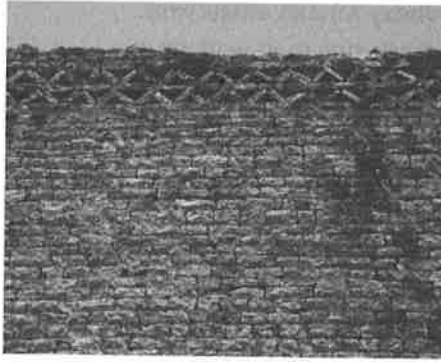
In a culture that generally eschews stonework, both in its architecture and its sculpture, the royal complex at **Zimbabwe** (Figure 27.1) from the fourteenth century is most unusual. The sophisticated handling of this type of masonry implies a long-standing tradition of construction of permanent materials, traces of which have all but been lost.

#### Great Zimbabwe, c. 1000–1400, granite, Zimbabwe (Figures 27.1a and 27.1b)

- Zimbabwe derives from a Shona term meaning “venerated houses” or “houses of stone”
- Prosperous trading center and royal complex
- Stone enclosure, probably a royal residence
- Walls: 800 feet long, 32 feet tall, 17 feet thick at base
- Conical tower modeled on traditional shapes of grain silos; control over food symbolized wealth, power, and royal largesse



Figure 27.1a: Conical tower of Great Zimbabwe, c. 1000–1400, granite, Zimbabwe



Figures 27.1b: Circular Wall of Great Zimbabwe

- Walls slope inward toward the top, made of exfoliated granite blocks
- Internal and external passageways are tightly bounded, narrow, and long, forcing occupants to walk in single file, paralleling experiences in the African bush
- Tower resembles a granary; represented a good harvest and prosperity
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Ashlar Masonry**
  - Saqsa Waman (Figure 26.8c)
  - Angkor Wat (Figure 23.8a)
  - Parthenon (Figures 6.11a, 6.11b)



Figure 27.2: Great Mosque, c. 1200, rebuilt 1906–1907, adobe, remodeled in 1907, Djenné, Mali

**Great Mosque, c. 1200, rebuilt 1906–1907, adobe, remodeled in 1907, Djenné, Mali (Figure 27.2)**

- Three tall towers, one in center is a mihrab
- Crowning ornaments have ostrich eggs: symbols of fertility and purity
- Torons: wooden beams projecting from walls
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Other Mosques**
  - Great Mosque, Córdoba (Figures 9.14a, 9.14b, 9.14c)
  - Mosque of Selim II (Figures 9.16a, 9.16b, 9.16c)
  - Great Mosque, Isfahan (Figures 9.13a, 9.13b, 9.13c)
- Made of adobe, a baked mixture of clay and straw
- Wooden beams act as permanent ladders for the maintenance of the building
- Vertical fluting drains water off the surfaces quickly
- Largest mud-brick mosque in the world

## AFRICAN SCULPTURE

Despite the number of sculptural traditions in Africa, there are certain similarities.

- African art is basically portable. Large sculptures, the kind that grace the plazas of ancient Egypt or Rome, are unknown.
- Wood is the favorite material. Trees were honored and symbolically repaid for the branches taken from them. Ivory is used as a sign of rank or prestige. Metal shows strength and durability, and is restricted to royalty. Stone is extremely rare.
- Figures are basically frontal, drawn full-face, with attention paid to the sides. Symmetry is occasionally used, but more talented artists vary their approach on each side of the object.
- Africans did no preliminary sketches and worked directly on the wood. There is a certain stiffness to all African works.
- Heads are disproportionately large, sometimes one-third of the whole figure. Sexual characteristics are also enlarged. Bodies are immature and small. Hands and feet are very small; fingers are rare.
- Multiple media are used. It is common to see wood sculptures adorned with feathers, fabric, or beads.
- African sculpture prefers geometrization of forms. It generally avoids physical reality, representing the spirits in a more timeless world. Proportions are therefore manipulated.

Important sculpture is never created for decoration, but for a definite purpose. African masks are meant to be part of a costume that represents a spirit, and can only come alive when ceremonies are initiated. Every mask has a purpose and represents a different spirit. When the masks are worn in a ceremony, the spirit takes over the costumed dancer and his identity remains unknown—every part of his body is hidden from view. Moved by the beat of a drum, the masked dancer connects with the spirit world and can transmit messages to villagers who are witnesses.

## BENIN

**Wall plaque from Oba's palace, sixteenth century, brass, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Figure 27.3)**

- 900 brass plaques produced; between 16 and 18 inches
- Decorated walls of royal palace in Benin
- Part of a sprawling palace complex; wooden pillars covered with brass plaques
- Show aspects of court life in the Benin culture
- Oba ("king") believed to be direct descendant of Oranmiyan, the legendary founder of the dynasty
- Only the Oba was allowed to be shielded in the way depicted on the plaque
- Hierarchical proportions: largest figure was the greatest
- Symbols of high rank are emphasized
- Stepping on a fallen leader
- Emphasis on heads; bodies are often small and immature
- Lost wax process
- Ceremonial scene at court
- High relief sculpture
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Bronze and Brass Work**
  - Donatello, *David* (Figure 15.5)
  - Great Buddha at Todai-ji (Figure 25.1b)
  - *Shiva as Lord of Dance* (Figure 23.6)



Figure 27.3: Wall plaque from Oba's palace, sixteenth century, brass, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

## ASHANTI

**Golden Stool (Skaa dwa kofi), c. 1700, gold over wood, location unknown (Figure 27.4)**

- Symbol of the Ashanti nation; held in Ghana
- Contains the soul of the nation
- Never actually used as a stool; never allowed to touch the ground
- New king is raised over the stool
- Carried to the king on a pillow; he alone is allowed to touch it
- Taken out on special occasions
- Entire surface inlaid with gold
- Bells hang from the side to warn the king of danger
- Replicas often used in ceremonies, but each replica is different
- War of the Golden Stool: March–September 1900
- Conflict over British sovereignty in Ghana (formerly Gold Coast)
- British representative tried to sit on the stool; caused an uproar and subsequent rebellion
- War ended in British annexation and Ashanti de facto independence



Figure 27.4: Golden Stool (Skaa dwa kofi), c. 1700, gold over wood, location unknown

- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Sacred Objects**

- Kaaba (Figure 9.11a)
- Lanzón Stela (Figure 26.1b)
- Gold and Jade Crown (Figure 24.10)



Figure 27.5a: Ndop (portrait figure) of King Mishe miShyaang maMbul, 1760–1780, wood, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York

### KUBA

**Ndop (portrait figure) of King Mishe miShyaang maMbul, 1760–1780, wood, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York (Figure 27.5a)**

- Ndop figures are commemorative portraits of Kuba rulers, presented in an ideal state
- Not an actual representation of a deceased king, but his spirit
- Made after death of the king
- Each king is commemorated by symbols on the base of the figure; this king has a sword in his left hand in a non-aggressive pose, handle facing out
- One of the earliest existing African wood sculptures; oldest ndop in existence
- Rubbed with oil to protect them from insects
- Acted as a surrogate for the king in his absence
- Characteristics of ndop figures:
  - Cross-legged pose
  - Sits on a base
  - Face seems uninvolved; above mortal affairs
  - A peace knife in left hand
- Kept in the king's shrine with other works called a set of “royal charms”
- Royal regalia: bracelets, arm bands, belts, headdress
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Authority Figures**
  - Houdon, *George Washington* (Figure 19.7)
  - Lindauer, *Tamati Waka Nene* (Figure 28.7)
  - Stele of Hammurabi (Figures 2.4a, 2.4b)



Figure 27.5b: Kuba Nyim (ruler) Kot a Mbwecky III in state dress with royal drum in Mushenge, Congo

### CONTEXTUAL IMAGE

**Kuba Nyim (ruler) Kot a Mbwecky III in state dress with royal drum in Mushenge, Congo (Figure 27.5b)**

- Photo of a Kuba ruler enthroned wearing royal regalia
- Headdress
- Necklace of leopard teeth
- Sword
- Lance
- Drums of reign
- Basket
- Photo made in 1971 capturing a royal event
- Continuous tradition of honoring a Kuba king
- Costuming extremely elaborate; could weigh 185 pounds, he needed help to move
- Costuming represents the splendor of his court, his greatness, and his responsibilities
- Symbolizes the ruler's wealth, status, power

- Kuba taste of accumulation of objects
- Ruler often buried with the material after his death

## KONGO

**Power figure (Nkisi n'kondi), c. late nineteenth century, wood and metal (Figure 27.6)**

- Spirits are embedded in the images
- Spirits can be called upon to bless or harm others, cause death, or give life
- In order to prod the image into action, nails and blades are often inserted into the work or removed from it
- Medical properties are inserted into the body cavity, thought to be a person's life or soul
- Nails pounded into the figure
- Alert pose
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Wood Sculpture**
  - Röttgen Pietà (Figure 12.7)
  - Transformation mask (Figures 26.12a, 26.12b)
  - Nio guardian figure (Figures 25.1c, 25.1d)



Figure 27.6: Power figure (Nkisi n'kondi), c. late 19th century, wood and metal

## BAULE

**Portrait mask (Mblo), late nineteenth to early twentieth century, wood and pigment (Figure 27.7)**

- Presented at Mblo performances in which an individual is honored by having ritual dances and tributes are performed in someone's honor
- Honoree receives mask as a gift that reflects an artistic double
- Masks commissioned by a group of admirers, not by an individual
- Dancer who wears the mask and wears the clothes of the honored person is accompanied by the actual person during the performance
- Idealized representation of a real person; not a portrait in the modern sense of the term
- Portraits of real people, even if commemorative, are rare in African art
- Broad foreheads, pronounced eye sockets, column-shaped nose
- Quiet faces; introspective look; peaceful face; meditative; eyebrows in an arch



Figure 27.7: Portrait mask (Mblo), late 19th to early 20th century, wood and pigment

## CHOKWE

**Female (Pwo) mask, late nineteenth to early twentieth century, wood, fiber, pigment, and metal, National Museum of African Art, Washington D.C. (Figure 27.8)**

- Female masks used by men in ritual dances
- Male dancers are covered with their identities masked; dressed as women with braided hair
- Ritual in which men move like women
- Chokwe a matriarchal society
- Depicts female ancestors



Figure 27.8: Female (Pwo) mask, late nineteenth to early twentieth century, wood, fiber, pigment, and metal, National Museum of African Art, Washington D.C.

- Mask is discarded when not in use; can be buried with the dancer
- Characteristics:
  - Enlarged eye sockets
  - Pushed in chin
  - Slender nose
  - High forehead
  - Balanced features
  - Almost closed eyes
- **Cross-Cultural Connections: Faces**
  - Roman Patrician (Figure 6.14)
  - Transformation mask (Figures 26.12a, 26.12b)
  - Lindauer, *Tamati Waka Nene* (Figure 28.7)



Figure 27.9: Bundu mask, Sande Society, 19th to 20th century, wood, cloth, and fiber, Private Collection

### MENDE

**Bundu mask, Sande Society, nineteenth to early twentieth century, wood, cloth, and fiber, Private Collection (Figure 27.9)**

- Only African wooden masks worn by women
- Idealized female beauty
- Elaborate hairstyle symbolizes wealth; worn by women of status
- Large forehead
- Small eyes in the shape of slits
- Tight-lipped mouth symbolizing secrets not revealed
- Sande society is a group of women who prepare girls for adulthood and their role in society
- Costumed women wear a black gown made of raffia that hides the body
- Costumed as a Soweï, the water spirit; rings around neck symbolize concentric waves from which Soweï breaks through the surface
- Mask rests on her head; head not placed inside the mask
- Mask coated with palm oil for a lustrous effect
- Black color symbolizes water, coolness, and humanity
- Individuality of each mask is stressed
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Art as Part of a Performance**
  - Presentation of Fijian mats ... (Figure 28.10)
  - Viola, *The Crossing* (Figures 29.18a, 29.18b)
  - Plaque of the Ergastines (Figure 4.5)



Figure 27.10: *Ikenga* (shrine figure), c. nineteenth–twentieth century, wood, Brooklyn Museum, New York

### IGBO

***Ikenga* (shrine figure), c. nineteenth to twentieth century, wood, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York (Figure 27.10)**

- *Ikenga* means “strong right arm,” thus physical prowess
- Honors the right hand, which holds tools or weapons, makes sacrifices, conducts rituals, and alerts to speak at public forums
- Traditional masculine associations of strength and potency
- Carved from hardwoods considered masculine
- It tells of the owner’s morality, prosperity, achievements, genealogy, social rank



- Personal god of achievement and success
- Requires blessings before use; consecrated with offerings before kinsmen
- Enormous horns symbolize power
- As man achieves more success he might commission a more elaborate version
- It is maintained in the man's home; destroyed when the owner dies; another can reuse it if not destroyed
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Sculpture in the Round**
  - Queen Hatshepsut with Offering Jars (Figure 3.9)
  - Rodin, *The Burghers of Calais* (Figure 21.15)
  - Abakanowicz, *Androgyn III* (Figure 29.7)

## LUBA

**Memory Board (Lukasa), Mbudye Society, c. nineteenth to twentieth century, wood, beads, and metal, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York (Figure 27.11)**

- Memory Board, or lukasa, helps the user remember key elements in a story, for example:
  - Court ceremonies
  - Migrations
  - Heroes
  - Kinship
  - Genealogy
  - Lists of kings
- Carved from wood in an hourglass shape; then adorned with shells, beads, or metal
- Reader holds lukasa in left hand and traces the designs with the right index finger
- Ability to read the board is limited to a few people
- Back resembles a tortoise
- Reading example:
  - One colored bead can stand for an individual
  - Large beads surrounded by smaller beads is a king and his court
  - Lines of beads are journeys or paths
- Each board's design is unique and represents the divine revelations of a spirit medium expressed in sculptural form
- Memory Boards are controlled by the *mbudye*, a council of men and women who interpret the political and historical aspects of Luba society
- Zoomorphic elements symbolize the crocodile, an animal that lives on both land and water; dual nature of crocodile is a metaphor for the Luba's political organization which has two interdependent leaders: the *kikungulu* (head of the *mbudye*) and the *kaloba* ("owner of the land," or chief).



Figure 27.11: Memory Board (Lukasa), Mbudye Society, c. nineteenth to twentieth century, wood, beads, and metal, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York

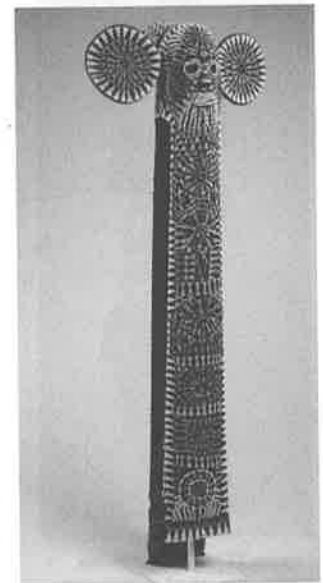


Figure 27.12: Aka elephant mask, c. nineteenth to twentieth century, wood, woven raffia, cloth, and beads

## BAMILEKE

**Aka elephant mask, c. nineteenth to twentieth century, wood, woven raffia, cloth, and beads (Figure 27.12)**

- Only important people in society can own and wear an aka, or elephant mask; used at a royal court



Figure 27.13: Reliquary guardian figure (nlo bieri), c. nineteenth to twentieth century, wood, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York



Figure 27.14: Olowe of Ise, Veranda post of enthroned king and senior wife (Opo Ogoga), 1910–1914, wood and pigment, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

- Elite Kuosi masking society owns and wears the masks; worn on important ceremonial occasions
- Beadwork a symbol of power
- Symbolizes features of an elephant: long trunk, large ears (symbolizes strength and power)
- Mask fits over the head and two folds hang down in front (symbolizing the trunk) and behind the body
- Performance art: maskers dance barefoot to a drum and gong; they wave spears and horsetails
- Human face
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Spiritual World**
  - Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (Figures 17.4a, 17.4b)
  - Staff God (Figures 28.5a, 28.5b)
  - *Queen Hatshepsut with Offering Jars* (Figure 3.9)

## FANG

**Reliquary guardian figure (nlo bieri), c. 19th to 20th century, wood, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York (Figure 27.13)**

- Figures placed on top of cylinder-like containers made of bark that hold skulls and other bones of important clan leaders
- Feet dangling over the rim in a gesture of protecting the contents
- The reliquary figure guards the head box against the gaze of women or young boys
- Bieri figures are composed of characteristics the Fang people place high value on: tranquility, introspection, vitality
- Surfaces were ritually rubbed with oils to add luster and protect against insects
- Prominent belly button and genitals emphasize life; the prayerful gesture and somber look emphasize death
- Abstraction of human body an attraction for the early twentieth century artists
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Male Figure**
  - Apollo from Veii (Figure 5.5)
  - Donatello, *David* (Figure 15.5)
  - Nio guardian figure (Figures 25.1c, 25.1d)

## YORUBA

**Olowe of Ise, Veranda post of enthroned king and senior wife (Opo Ogoga), 1910–1914, wood and pigment, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois (Figure 27.14)**

- Olowe of Ise carved posts for the rulers of the Ekiti-Yoruba kingdom in Nigeria
- One of four carved for the palace at Ikere
- Negative space creates an openness in the composition
- King is the focal point in relationship between his figure and others represented on this post
- Behind him his large-scale senior wife supporting the throne
- She crowns the king during the coronation; protects him during his reign

- Small figures: junior wife; flute player is Esu, the trickster god; a now missing fan bearer
- Most veranda posts were painted; traces of paint remain
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Multi-Figure Sculptures**
  - Helios, Horses and Dionysos (Figure 4.4)
  - Rodin, *The Burghers of Calais* (Figure 21.15)
  - Menkaura and His Queen (Figure 3.7)

## VOCABULARY

**Adobe:** a building material made from earth, straw, or clay dried in the sun (Figure 27.2)

**Aka:** an elephant mask of the Bamileke people of Cameroon (Figure 27.12)

**Bieri:** in the art of the Fang people, a reliquary guardian figure (Figure 27.13)

**Bundu:** masks used by the women's Sande society to bring girls into puberty (Figure 27.9)

**Cire perdue:** the lost wax process. A bronze casting method in which a figure is modeled in clay and covered with wax and then recovered with clay. When fired in a kiln, the wax melts away, leaving a channel between the two layers of clay which can be used as a mold for liquid metal (Figure 27.3)

**Fetish:** an object believed to possess magical powers

**Ikenga:** a shrine figure symbolizing traditional male attributes of the Igbo people (Figure 27.10)

**Lukasa:** a memory board used by the Luba people of central Africa (Figure 27.11)

**Mblo:** a commemorative portrait of the Baule people (Figure 27.7)

**Ndop:** a Kuba commemorative portrait of a king in an ideal state (Figure 27.5a)

**Nkisi n'kondi:** a Kongo power figure (Figure 27.6)

**Pwo:** a female mask worn by women of the Chokwe people (Figure 27.8)

**Scarification:** scarring of the skin in patterns by cutting with a knife: when the cut heals, a raised pattern is created, which is painted

**Torons:** Wooden beams projecting from walls of adobe buildings (Figure 27.2)

## SUMMARY

African artists operated under the same general conditions of artists everywhere—learning their craft in a period of apprenticeship, working on commission from the powerful and politically connected, and achieving a measure of international fame. However, because African artists relied on the oral tradition, little written documentation of their achievements has been recorded.

Africans achieved great distinction in the carving of masks, both in wood and metal. Costumed dancers don the mask and assume the powers of the spirit that it represents. The role of the mask, therefore, indeed the role of African art, is never merely decorative, but functional and spiritual; works are imbued with powers that are symbolically much greater than the merely visible representation.

## PRACTICE EXERCISES

### Multiple-Choice

Questions 1–3 refer to the image below.



1. Great Zimbabwe had many functions, including all of the following EXCEPT
  - (A) a storehouse for grain used for dispersal in times of need
  - (B) a military fortress used to keep invaders out
  - (C) a royal residence of the king and his court
  - (D) an open area for ceremonial activities to take place
2. Visitors who entered Great Zimbabwe were meant
  - (A) to be left with the feeling that they were in a major city and transportation hub
  - (B) to be impressed that this was the center of manufacturing and industry
  - (C) to admire the impressive and extensive use of stone in a part of the world that specialized in more perishable types of construction
  - (D) to admire the painted friezes depicting the military exploits of the king
3. The stone walls of Great Zimbabwe exemplify the Southern African architectural practices of
  - (A) using ashlar masonry to create force-dependent structures
  - (B) making the stones from mud-backed bricks, similar to adobe construction
  - (C) spanning large interior spaces with great arches
  - (D) employing flying buttresses to support the massive walls
4. Each Kongo power figure (Nkisi n'kondi) had a unique function ascribed to an individual sculpture. They could be used for all of the following purposes EXCEPT:
  - (A) recovery from disease
  - (B) helping communities out of difficulties
  - (C) destroying enemies
  - (D) insuring a successful mate

5. The power of Nkisi n'kondi figures is activated by
- (A) nailing blades into the surface of a figure
  - (B) carrying a figure in a procession around a village square
  - (C) "marrying" the image to a second power figure
  - (D) masking the figure to allow its powers to work unseen

### Short Essay

The work on the left is a Pwo mask from the Congo, around the early twentieth century.



Identify the work on the right.

Both masks are used in ceremonies. Describe the purpose of each ceremony.

What else was used in these ceremonies besides the masks?

Analyze how the form of the mask is meant to convey important elements in the rituals.

### ANSWER KEY

1. **B** 2. **C** 3. **A** 4. **D** 5. **A**

### ANSWERS EXPLAINED

#### Multiple-Choice

1. **(B)** There is no evidence that this building was used for military activity, even though the stone walls suggest that this was an option available to those who lived inside.
2. **(C)** Stone buildings are rare in traditional African culture, making this complex admirable from both architectural and engineering points of view.
3. **(A)** No mortar is used in the construction of Great Zimbabwe; therefore, it is made of ashlar masonry.

4. **(D)** Power figures have many functions, but insuring a successful mate is not one of them, as evidenced by the very brutal nature of hammering blades into the surface.
5. **(A)** The power figure is activated by nailing blades into the surface.

### Short-Essay Rubric

Question	Points	Key Points in a Good Response
Identify the work on the right.	1	Malagan mask, New Ireland province, Papua New Guinea, c. twentieth century, wood, pigment, fiber, and shell.
Both masks are used in ceremonies. Describe the purpose of each ceremony.	1	<p>Pwo mask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Female masks used by men in ritual dances</li> <li>■ Male dancers are covered with their identities masked; dressed as women with braided hair</li> <li>■ Ritual in which men move like a woman</li> <li>■ Depicts female ancestors</li> </ul> <p>Malagan mask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Malagan ceremonies send the souls of the deceased on their way to the otherworld</li> </ul>
What else was used in these ceremonies besides the masks?	1	<p>Answers could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Dance, music</li> <li>■ Costume</li> <li>■ Chanting</li> <li>■ Scent</li> </ul>
Analyze how the form of the mask is meant to convey important elements in the rituals.	2	<p>Pwo mask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Chokwe, a matriarchal society</li> <li>■ Depicts female ancestors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enlarged eye sockets</li> <li>- Pushed-in chin</li> <li>- Slender nose</li> <li>- High forehead</li> <li>- Balanced features</li> <li>- Almost closed eyes</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Malagan mask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Masks are extremely intricate in their carving</li> <li>■ Mask indicates the relationship of a particular deceased person to a clan and to living members of the family</li> <li>■ Large hair comb reflects a hairstyle of the time, but masks are not physical portraits, only portraits of the soul</li> <li>■ Painted black, yellow, and red: important colors denoting violence, war, and magic</li> </ul>