

Arts of Africa





AFRICA, one of the oldest inhabited areas on earth, has fifty-five countries, nine territories, and two states. The continent is home to hundreds of ethnic groups who speak a variety of languages and dialects. Each ethnic group has interrelated but unique and ever-evolving beliefs, customs, and styles of art and architecture. Whether colorful Kente cloths made by the Akan of present-day Ghana or the sculptural stools of the Yoruba of present-day Nigeria, artistic forms reflect the range of African cultures and the important roles that art has played and continues to play in religious ceremonies, social celebrations, and daily life. This guide will help you learn more about the objects on view in the gallery of African art.

Sculpture

Much African sculpture was used in performances or other rituals; the objects were part of daily life and moved around with people. For this reason, most African art is three-dimensional and is meant to be seen from all sides.



This is a 20th-century Ikenga figure made by an Igbo sculptor. Ikenga figures represent power and the accomplishments of an individual or group. Men prayed to them and gave them gifts of nuts, wine, or, sometimes, a rooster or a ram. They believed that Ikenga would save them from enemies and bring wealth and good luck.

What does Ikenga have on his head?

Ikenga figures are always shown with horns, symbols of power and aggression. This artist has turned the horns into an elaborate headdress.



Igbo artist (Nigeria), Ikenga, first half of the 20th century. Wood and polychrome, 116 x 30 x 30 cm. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (2010-129)

Containers

People throughout history have made and used containers. Some containers store objects; others hold material with spiritual meaning, value, or memories. Today we are going to look at containers made by artists from different African cultures for a variety of purposes.

Be sure to look closely. What are they made of? What shapes and patterns do you see? What are they meant to hold?

Storage Containers

Find these two examples of containers that were made for storing things. Notice that the first container is a basket woven from plant fiber. The second container is made of wood, but it is decorated to look like a woven basket. Try to find another example of a container that was made to store things. Draw it or write the name of the object in the space provided.



Tutsi artist, Basket with lid (*ibeseke*), 20th century. Plant fiber and dye, h. 13.5 cm, diam. 6.6 cm. Bequest of John B. Elliott, Class of 1951 (1998-749 a-b)



Kuba artist, Vessel, late 19th-20th century. Wood, h. 21.2 cm, diam. 10.2 cm. Gift of Perry E. H. Smith, Class of 1957 (v1985-76)

Ritual Containers

Find these two containers, which were made to hold spirits or ritual materials.
Find another example of a vessel that was made for spiritual purposes.
Draw it or write the name of the object in the space provided.



Areogun (Nigerian, 1880–1954), Bowl for divination implements (*Opon igede ifa*), before 1923. Wood and organic materials, h. 58.4 cm, diam. 43.2 cm. Museum acquisition from the Holly and David Ross Collection, with the support of the Fowler McCormick Fund (2015-8 a–b)



Kongo artist, Power figure (*nkisi*), early 20th century. Wood, mirror, glass beads, glass, cotton, silk, metal, gourd, resin, paint, plant fiber, and kaolin, 36.2 x 7.6 x 8.9 cm. Museum acquisition from the Holly and David Ross Collection (2017-157)

Containers of Value

Find these two objects, which contain wealth. Try to find a third container that was made to hold something valuable, representing the wealth and power of its owner.
Draw it or write the name of the object in the space provided.



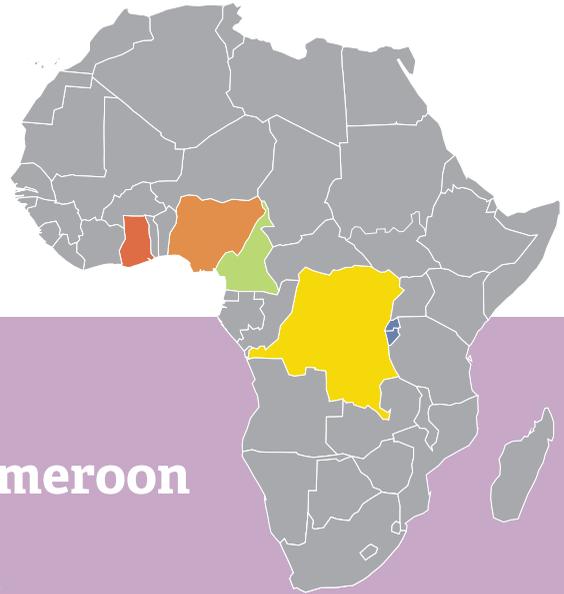
Possibly Luba artist, H-shaped ingot ("Katanga cross" or possibly *handa*), 19th century or earlier. Copper alloy, 29.5 x 44.1 x 4.5 cm. The John B. Elliott, Class of 1951, Collection (1998-909)



Possibly Teke artist, Cloth, before 1924. Raffia and dye, h. 65.0 cm, w. 60.4 cm (without fringe). Gift of Mrs. Donald B. Doyle in memory of her husband, Class of 1905 (y1953-95)

Where in Africa is it?

Use the labels next to each object in the gallery to learn where these objects are from. **Draw a line connecting the work of art to its country of origin.**



Cameroon

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Rwanda or Burundi

Ghana

Nigeria

Masks

In another wall case you'll see a mask. Worn by dancers as part of elaborate costumes, masks played (and sometimes still play) an important role in the traditional rituals and ceremonies of

many African cultures. Spirits were sometimes thought to dwell inside the masks and were brought to life during masquerades, dramatic performances by fully costumed figures.



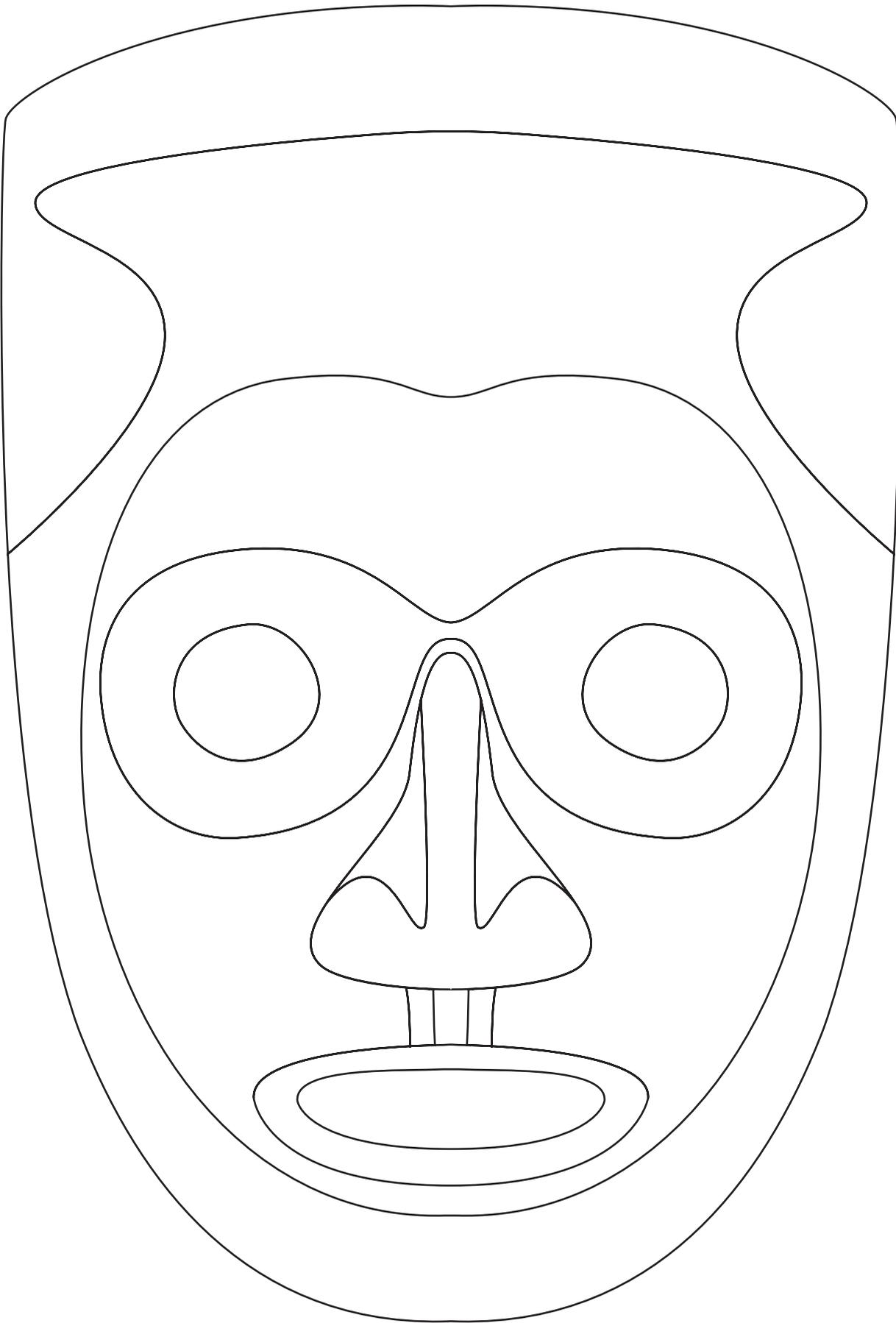
Kuba artist (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Mask, late 19th–20th century. Wood, raffia, shells, and feathers, 28 x 30.3 x 34.5 cm. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Melvin A. Scharfman (y1980-25)

This mask from the Kuba kingdom (in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) was probably used in initiation ceremonies for young boys as they passed into adulthood. The face, with its deep eye sockets and flaring nose, is carved of wood. The sloping forehead is decorated with feathers, shells, and raffia (a fiber made from palm trees). Many years ago, this mask may have been painted with the traditional geometric designs of the Kuba peoples, but its colors have been lost over time.

Activity for Home

At home, cover the mask on the opposite page with geometric designs, using the Kuba patterns on the right to inspire your decoration. You can even cut it out and decorate it with feathers or yarn.





Thank you for joining us today to explore the art of Africa. Don't forget to stop at the information desk to collect a sticker for your **Artful Adventures Passport**. We hope that you enjoyed your visit to the Princeton University Art Museum and that you will come back again to join us for another Artful Adventure!

Suggested Reading

Non-fiction for Young Children

***Anansi the Spider:
A Tale from the Ashanti***
by Gerald McDermott

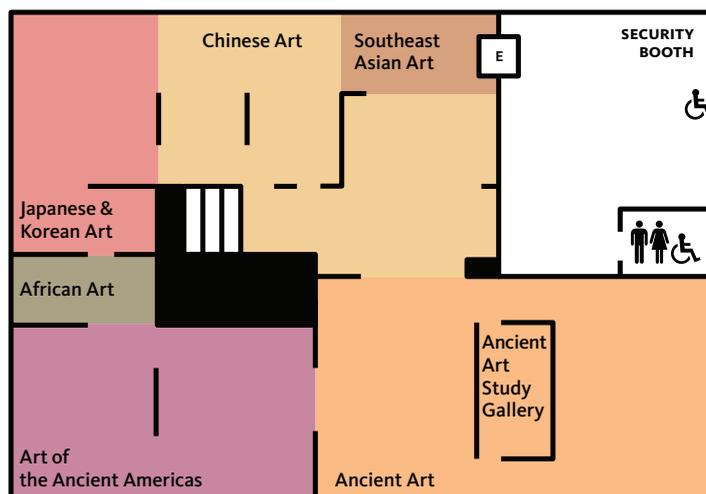
***The Spider Weaver:
A Legend of Kente Cloth***
by Margaret Musgrove

***Ashanti to Zulu:
African Traditions***
by Margaret Musgrove

Non-fiction for Older Children

Atlas of Africa
by Karen Foster

The Art of African Masks
by Carol Finley



FRONT COVER: Areogun (Nigerian, 1880–1954), Bowl for divination implements (*Opon igede ifa*) (detail), before 1923. Wood and organic materials, 58.4 x 43.2 cm. Museum acquisition from the Holly and David Ross Collection, with the support of the Fowler McCormick Fund (2015-8 a–b)