

The Naming Game

Ideologies of Luba Artistic Identity

MARY NOOTER ROBERTS

Luba peoples are credited with developing one of the most complex and brilliant mnemonic systems in Africa for recording royal history, king lists, migrations, initiation esoterica, and family genealogies (Roberts & Roberts 1996). Their invention of the *lukasa* memory board (Fig. 1), an ingenious visual device for stimulating recall of innumerable historical facts, shows that they are capable of preserving and transmitting any kind of historical information they choose—when they choose. *Lukasa* boards evoke the heroes and exploits of the great Luba epic; the biographies of particular kings; the names, titles, and duties of all the court dignitaries; sacred loci in the landscape where particular named spirits reside; countless proverbs, maxims, and songs; and even the precise locations and contents of the royal treasuries. But interestingly enough, never in the many recitations and narratives elicited by memory boards and related royal arts during my field research did I hear court historians or other narrators cite the names or identities of artists.¹

Similarly, Luba artworks brought to the West since the nineteenth century and now held in museums throughout Europe and the United States are rarely accompanied by documentation on their makers' identities. The Africa-Museum, Tervuren, Belgium (also known as the Royal Museum of Central Africa and the Tervuren-Museum), founded by King Leopold II in 1897–98 to house the cultural wealth of the Congo Free State (his personal fiefdom), is one of the most archivally well-endowed institutions of colonial memory. Even so, Luba artists' names are primarily absent, in spite of the fact that the Luba acquisitions, which include works by discernible hands and workshops, constitute one of the muse-

um's most important artistic legacies (Verwijver et al. 1995).²

Explaining the absences of data on artists is a matter of reconstructing not only Luba senses of naming but also the ways that naming games meet at the intersection of kingdoms and colonies, and constitute a contested terrain of negotiation and representation. The purpose of this paper is first to ascertain Luba concepts of artistic identity and processes of artistic exchange and then to demonstrate how Luba ideologies of artistic identity interface with notions of naming in Western contexts in which the objects have navigated for decades.

The Cultural Construction of Artistic Identity

What's in a name? Is it the name or is it the process of naming that matters? Do all peoples ascribe the same importance to artists' names, or is authorship a cultural construction? Does the absence of recorded artists' names reveal more about the values of the culture that produced these works or those of the culture that absorbed them thereafter? Naming creates an arbitrary relationship between a thing or person and its name. "An object is not tied so much to its name that one could not find for it another that would suit it better" (René Magritte cited in Dopagne 1977: n.p.). And yet, naming is never neutral—it is both an appropriation of identity and an imposition of it. To withhold a person's identity may be a form of protection or of subjugation. To impose a name may be a form of repression or of elevation. Naming is often a mechanism for asserting ownership or for binding relationships: whether in celebration or in contestation, a name connects a child to its parent, a person to a profession or religion, the colonized to the colonizer.³

Since naming is always two sided, it should therefore be viewed from the perspectives of both the namer and the named. This article explores the West's historical construction of non-Western artistic identity versus ideologies of authorship proper to patrons and producers of objects in non-Western cultures. Does the absence of artists' names in the records accompanying collected artifacts reflect the colonizers' effacement of the colonized, or is it that the original owners of these works did not place a high premium on remembering artists' names? Is artistic authorship "a taken-for-granted assumption of modernism," related to contemporary Western notions of art and to the valuations of art in the marketplace? Do other cultures hold the same emphasis on "the artist's search for originality" (Fyfe & Law 1988:92)? If not, what are the motivating factors behind creativity and artistic production?

African art and indigenous notions of authorship deserve to be better understood on their own terms, which is the admirable goal of several recent exhibitions of Yoruba art and artists, including "Master Hand: Individuality and Creativity among Yoruba Sculptors," curated by Alisa LaGamma for the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1997–98), and "Olowe of Ise: A Yoruba Sculptor to Kings," curated by Roslyn Walker for the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art (1998). These exhibitions have successfully dismantled myths of artistic anonymity and rightly demonstrate that tradition *always* implies innovation (Yai 1994:107). The Yoruba case, with its very specific mnemonic tradition of *oriki* praise poetry to commemorate renowned artists, compellingly disproves earlier Western assumptions about the lesser importance of the artist in Yoruba society.⁴

Certain other African cultures share the affirmation of individual named artists (as Z. S. Strother will show in her article in the next issue). But in no two African cultures are attitudes toward artistic creativity exactly the same, and certain other African notions of originality and individuality are quite different from both Yoruba and European modernist traditions.

A modernist Western view would hold that the artist's role is to create something fresh and unusual, something that is a marked departure from previous practice. A Luba perspective would have it that all royal arts are copies of the first insignia belonging to the culture bearers of Luba kingship several centuries ago, and that all artists are themselves incarnations of the first Luba blacksmith-artist who came from the "east" (Fig. 2; Nooter 1991). Luba attitudes toward creativity and individual authorship are reflected in children's naming rituals. A Luba child comes into the world bearing the name of an ancestor whose identity was made known to the mother via a dream sometime during her pregnancy. In this philosophy, a child is never an entirely original product but always a reappearance of a previous life. Originality takes on new meaning as past and present are conflated. Just as the Latin roots and the Middle English etymology of the word "origin" derive from "ancestry" (Soukhanov 1993:1276), so is originality for Luba peoples wedded to a cyclical rather than a linear sense of time.⁵

An analysis of Luba art from the Democratic Republic of the Congo will demonstrate that Western modernist concepts of art and authorship cannot simply be imposed upon non-Western cultures. Creativity and originality are culturally constructed practices, linked to complex ontological and aesthetic beliefs about what objects *are* and can *do*, and the roles artists play in these processes. Furthermore, one cannot divorce indigenous attitudes about artistic identity from the entangled histories through which these works have navigated for decades in the West, or from processes of Western identity formation. Once non-Western objects have entered the Western market context, their earlier attributions and identities become wholly intermingled with those

1. Memory board (*lukasa*). Luba. Democratic Republic of the Congo. Wood, beads, metal; 34cm (13.4"). Collection of Susanne K. Bennet.

Memory boards were invented by Luba peoples as early as the eighteenth century to serve as mnemonic devices for the preservation and transmission of key names and events associated with the kingdom. Through codified patterns of beads and shells, they elicit an abundance of information, such as king lists, genealogies, initiation esoterica, and the royal epic. Artists' names and identities, however, do not figure in these local archives of historical knowledge, nor do they often appear in museum documentation.



JERRY L. THOMPSON



This page:

2. Luba artist at work in the Shankadi region, 1988. Photo: Mary Nooter Roberts.

The Shankadi region was the heartland of the Luba kingdom at its height during the 17th–19th centuries. Artists attribute their professional identity to the culture heroes of Luba kingship, who introduced the first and “original” set of royal insignia, of which all subsequent examples are considered to be mere copies and imitations. The divination bowl figure that is being carved embodies the memory of the original diviner, Mijibu’a Kalenga, who played a pivotal role of prophecy and clairvoyance in the founding of the Luba kingdom.

Opposite page:

3. Stool (see also Fig. 21). Luba/Hemba regions, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Wood, 61cm (24”). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, Buckeye Trust and Charles B. Benenson Gifts, Rogers Fund and funds from various donors, 1979 (1979.290).

This stool is one in the corpus of works by the so-called Buli Master, whose repertoire of known works now numbers almost twenty. The stool represents the innovation of an extraordinary artist or artists who went beyond the boundaries of convention and expectation to create a corpus of daringly moving sculptures. Frans Olibrechts of the Africa-Museum, Tervuren, identified this hand in the 1930s; his was the first study in the history of African art to focus on a single artist.

stories (Appadurai 1986; Roberts, Vogel & Müller 1994:37–55).

Authorship and Authority

The non-Western artist’s identity is a critical element in the politics of representation that, oddly, has been overlooked in the emerging literature on museums, exhibiting, and the culture of collecting,⁷ even as issues of curatorial authorship move to the forefront of debate and discussion (MacDonald 1998:191, 232). For those involved in the contested terrain of “exhibiting cultures” (Karp & Lavine 1991), it is now generally accepted that collecting and display are culturally determined, historically specific practices that reflect perpetually changing systems of value: “Every appropriation of culture, whether by insiders or outsiders, implies a specific temporal position and form of historical narration....The Western practice of culture collecting has its own local genealogy, enmeshed in distinct European notions of temporality and order” (Clifford 1988:232). Within this genealogy are two separate (though sometimes overlapping) modes of classification—ethnography and art—in which the artist’s identity has had different and often incompatible values and roles.⁸

In the former, a work of “sculpture” is displayed along with other objects of similar function or in proximity to objects from the same cultural group, including utilitarian artifacts....A mask or statue may be grouped with formally dis-

bestowed upon them by their new proprietors. Gordon Fyfe states,

Works of art are not things-in-themselves. Images gain admission to the realm of art through the medium of discursive rules that are knowledgeably applied by experts and art lovers. Such discourse does not float free of power, interests and social contexts in which art lovers come to know art objects although their meanings may be constructed around a denial of such contexts.

(Fyfe & Law 1988:93)

Definitions of “culture” and “art” have had their own histories in the West and, as James Clifford notes (1988:236), “can no longer be simply extended to non-Western

peoples and things. They can at worst be imposed, at best translated—both historically and politically contingent operations.”

Luba mnemonic traditions and archival documents lend partial insight into Luba notions of authorship and practices of artistic production and exchange in the precolonial period. Yet, colonial collecting and subsequent exhibition, market valuation, and scholarship on Luba objects in the West have continued to transform their authorship. As objects have circulated from one context to another, and from one owner to the next, they have accumulated names and attributions in a kind of “imbrication of identity,”⁹ all the while moving further from their original producers (Baudrillard 1983), whose identities are paradoxically preserved in the form of the objects’ layered life his-



similar objects and explained as part of a ritual or institutional complex. *The names of individual sculptors are unknown, or suppressed. In the art museum a sculpture is identified as the creation of an individual....* Whereas in the ethnographic museum the object is culturally or humanly "interesting," in the art museum it is primarily "beautiful" or "original."

(Clifford 1985:242, my emphasis)

These positions are not fixed but constantly subject to new deployments as the values and categories of the "beautiful," the "cultural," and the "authentic" respond to changes in the art market and the world of commodities. The point is that the identities of non-Western artifacts are continually recontextualized to reinforce changing historical relations of power and to accommodate transforming definitions of "art" and "culture." As Nicholas Thomas states, "objects are not what they were made to be, but what they have become" (1991:4). One cannot, therefore, suppress the objects' own historical processes of production, collection, and recontextualization, and the "unsettled, nomadic existence of these non-Western artifacts."

The West's inclusions and exclusions of African artists' identities in museums and exhibitions are rooted in broader political and historical processes of nomenclature. Nowhere is the politics of naming more blatant than in the context of colonialism and related forms of imperialist activity that preceded the collecting of material culture. The hegemonic practices of colonialism laid claim to territories that belonged to others by drawing artificial boundaries around geographical features, by arbitrarily renaming villages, towns, and rivers, and by assigning ethnic attributions to the peoples inhabiting those regions. These authoritarian processes are addressed in a rich anthropological literature (summarized in A. Roberts 1985 and Roberts & Roberts 1996:211-42), in which certain scholars argue that "ethnicity" and "tribe" are largely colonial inventions and do not reflect the continual shifting and reshaping of clan and lineage political boundaries that have characterized African identity formation prior to, during, and since colonialism.

Luba peoples comprise a wash of myriad clan and lineage groupings that were more or less consolidated as a kingdom from approximately the seventeenth to late nineteenth centuries (Nooter 1991,

Roberts & Roberts 1996). Yet these groups never referred to themselves homogeneously as "Luba" until Arab traders and later European travelers and colonizers began to call them by that name in the late nineteenth century. During the colonial period, "Luba" came to be associated with a host of ideological, historical, racial, and political attributes that had both negative and positive connotations. People in southeastern Congo have adopted and continue to adopt the name when it suits their pur-

Left: 4. Eastern Lunda King Kazembe sits in state with his regalia, which include a beautiful Luba-style stool, a European chair, and a staff, fly whisk, and beaded necklace. From Crawford 1924:182. Objects were often used far from their place of production, as it was common for eastern Lunda and Luba-ized rulers to commission regalia from Luba artists or to obtain Luba and other insignia through gift exchange.

Right: 5. Kitwa Biseke, identified here by the missionary W. F. P. Burton as the "official carver of the Nkulu chiefship" (a Luba chiefdom), 1927-35. Photo: W. F. P. Burton. University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries, Johannesburg, BPC 05.15. Using only a knife and an adze, the artist is sculpting a divination bowl figure whose style is like that seen in Figure 6. Missionaries were often more scrupulous about recording the names of artists than their colonial counterparts were.



COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND ART GALLERIES

poses, for identity is never monolithic but always contingent; that is, identities may be negotiated, blurred, and inverted to accommodate changing historical circumstances. As Allen Roberts writes, "...ethnic identity is always a matter of debate, dispute, and negotiation" (Roberts & Roberts 1996:236); and according to Pierre Petit, "'Luba' is a most ambiguous category, one that is situationally defined" (1993:30).

In inverse relation to the imposition of foreign names upon the land and people was the stark omission of names from the fragments of culture that were amassed and removed from the colonized regions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to be taken back to Europe as souvenirs, trophies, and evidence of conquest.⁹ Luba objects were collected with little regard for the identities of the artists who produced them or the patrons who commissioned them, which led to their becoming timeless testimonies to "primitive" "exotic," and "other" peoples.

The absence of identification is especially ironic considering that the first study in the history of African art to focus on a single artist's hand was about a Luba sculptor. In the 1930s Frans Olbrechts of the Tervuren-Museum assigned several works (e.g., Fig. 3) to an artist whom he identified as the master of the "long-faced style," also known as the Buli Master, after the town where two sculptures were collected (1947:71-74).¹⁰ Yet, Olbrechts's observation did not forecast the discovery of many Luba artists' names. In spite of Susan Vogel's pioneering presentation of work by specific Luba artists at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1980) and other attempts to deepen our knowledge of individual Luba masters (Bassani 1976; Neyt 1994), we continue to have little biographical information on the great artists who produced these objects.

Entangled Identity¹¹

In the Luba case, retrieving the information undocumented by colonial collectors is not a simple matter. The story of Luba artistic identity is far too entangled. Because a hundred years of collecting Luba culture have intervened, one cannot pretend to recover a "pristine" past. One cannot assume that a biography of the Buli Master is still possible, untainted by the history of colonialism. As Thomas states, "Creative recontextu-

alization and indeed reauthorship may thus follow from taking, from purchase or theft; and since museums and exhibitions of history and culture are no less prominent now than in the epoch of world's fairs, that is a sort of entanglement that most of us cannot step outside" (1991:5).¹²

Lacking the documentation to know most Luba artists' actual names, collectors, dealers, museum professionals, and scholars have *invented* names, such as the Buli Master, the Master of the Cascade

Headdress, and the Warua Master. And each of these names has undergone further modification as the objects have moved from one collection to another. The Buli Master, who began as the Master of the Long-Faced Style, has since been identified as Ngongo ya Chintu and now as the Master of Kateba. The Master of the Cascade Headdress, first named by William Fagg because of the fan-shaped hairstyle depicted on all the sculptures in the corpus, has been renamed the the Master of the Kinkondja



6. Bowl figure. Luba. Democratic Republic of the Congo. Wood. Private collection.

This bowl figure in the Mwanza substyle is likely to have been one of the precursors (made only for local consumption) of the group of such figures later made under missionary guidance for a foreign clientele.

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JERRY L. THOMPSON, COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM FOR AFRICAN ART

Workshop; while the Warua Master has been called the Frobenius Master and, most recently, the Prince of Sopola.

While inventing the name of a master may seem a perfectly practical solution to the omissions in the literature, such inventions also reinforce and bring into high relief the ideological web of naming itself. Just as we can never fully reconstruct the original context of an African object,¹³ so is its artist's name in a state of perpetual metamorphosis as the work transits from its place of origin through subsequent lives and careers; often the object becomes ensnared in a tangle of commercial transactions, where a long list of provenance adds considerable value and cachet to its pedigree. One can learn a great deal about the provenance of certain Luba works by the genealogy

of the names assigned by others to their authors. These names reflect not only the "collecting history" of the object but also the way an object *collects histories* as it passes from one owner to the next.¹⁴

In both Luba and Western contexts, and especially at the borderlines where they meet, a useful way to understand the permutations of Luba artistic identity is through a concept of "processual identity." I adapt this term from Arjun Appadurai, whose application of the term "process geography" is a progressive way of thinking about geographical areas not as definable spaces surrounded and permanently fixed by mountains or water, but rather in terms of relationships of human interaction and entanglement.¹⁵ Processual identity may be viewed in a similar fashion, as "a matter of situation-



Left 7. Headrest. Luba, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Wood, beads; 17.5cm (6.9"). Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Udo Horstmann.

The Master of the Cascade Headrest is the invented name of the Shankadi sculptor of this elegant headrest. Headrests were among the most intimate of Luba objects, carried by their owners on trips and even buried with the deceased in the grave. Approximately twenty figures in the highly personal and innovative style that characterizes this hand or workshop have been identified.

Above 8. Luba woman wearing a coiffure called the "step" style, 1927-35. Photo: W. F. P. Burton. Africa-Museum, Tervuren.

Fashionable in the heartland of the kingdom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this coiffure is depicted on the female figures on headrests in the "cascade style."

al reckoning" (A. Roberts 1989:193), and can be a useful way to comprehend the fluid, porous, and generative ways that artistic creativity is conceived and conveyed in Luba culture.

Precolonial Processual Identity

Most of the archival records that date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the field research of those of us who have worked among Luba peoples up to the present, are characterized by a relative dearth of knowledge about individual artists. The abundant documentation accompanying the hundreds of Luba objects in Tervuren rarely if ever mentions artists. Occasionally the data include the name of the person represented by the sculpture; for example, a photograph of a Luba bow stand (by the so-called Warua Master) in Tervuren's archives is accompanied by notes stating that the female figure sup-



SCHECTER-LEE, COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

9. Headrest, Luba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 19th century. Wood, beads: 16.3cm (6.4"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Margaret Barton Plass in honor of William Fagg, C.M.C., 1961 (1981.399).

The Master of the Cascade Headdress sculpted as though he were composing a score, incorporating improvised flourishes and variations on a theme. In this headrest, the deliberate asymmetry of the arms and legs creates a dynamic tension, and a crisp sculpting technique accentuates the voids and silhouettes as much as the volumes and surfaces.

porting the emblem represents the mother (whose name is provided) of the chief who owned the staff and who was said to have led a migration across the Luvua River. Sometimes the name of the chief or dignitary who owned an object is given, but even then, the information is scant.

In the late 1980s I interviewed Luba people in the area that was once the heartland of the Luba kingdom. Their absence of recollection about specific artists, and the small number of sculptors active in the area at the time of my stay, in part reflects the complex web of patronage and production of insignia associated with the former kingdom from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth century. Thomas Reeve has effectively demonstrated (1981), and my own field research confirmed (Nooter 1991), that Luba insignia were offered regularly as gifts by kings to clients, and used as a form of exchange throughout the Luba region. The material data show that certain artists produced multiples of single object types—presumably for patron-kings in different regions, or else for a particular king who used the multiples for

gifts as a form of investiture, a way to bind outlying kingdoms to the center (Nooter 1991:42, 43). Also, because of the kingdom's tremendous prestige, chieftaincies on the frontiers of the heartland emulated and adopted the trappings of Luba royalty (Fig. 4), resulting in numerous copies of Luba insignia throughout central Shaba and even into Zambia among Bembe and Lunda peoples (A. Roberts 1985:94; Roberts & Roberts 1996:235–38).

To further complicate this artistic web, Luba artists executed commissions for foreign patrons. Some of these sculptors were itinerant and not necessarily from the areas where the objects ultimately were used; patrons are also known to have traveled great distances to commission works from highly regarded artists.¹⁶ Albert Maesen, the late curator of ethnography at



the Tervuren-Museum, suggested that many of the great Luba master sculptors may have been Kunda, an aristocratic clan that inhabited numerous eastern enclaves of the Luba kingdom during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (personal communication, 1988). The majority of objects considered to be the greatest examples of Luba art are in a style that originated from the eastern zones, not from the area that was the kingdom's center. Even Mbidi Kiluwe—the culture hero of Luba kingship—was Kunda by some accounts (Roberts & Roberts 1996:228). If artists were in fact connected with this lineage, and thus hailed from distant regions, that would partly explain why their names may be unknown in the heartland.

There are, nevertheless, objects associated with artists from the Luba heartland, where the well-known Luba-Shankadi style (also called Luba-Samba) is localized in and around the towns of Kamina, Bukama, Kinkondja, and Mwanza (de Maret et al. 1976). An article by Constantine Petridis and Pierre Petit (forthcoming) documents a corpus of Shankadi works collected by the Franciscan missionary Servaas Peeraer in the mid-1930s and donated to the University of Ghent in 1939.¹⁷ Although Peeraer's otherwise ample annotations are spare concerning

artists, he does record that two female figures called *bankishi*, used for divination, were made by a handicapped male sculptor named Kyabala of the village of Kininga of the Bene Kabondo clan.¹⁸

European missionaries were often more fastidious recorders of information about the objects they collected than their counterpart colonial officers and territorial administrators were. Many of the missionaries who inhabited the Luba region stayed for extensive periods of time and took a sincere and passionate interest in the local culture, as evidenced by the invaluable monographs they wrote on many aspects of Luba culture, history, and art (e.g., Theuvs 1962, Burton 1961, Colle 1913). In Figure 5, an artist is shown sculpting an object in the Shankadi style. The photograph, taken by the missionary W. F. P. Burton in the first two decades of this century, was accompanied by notes identifying the artist as Kitwa Biseke, "official carver of the Nkulu chiefship." A second photograph by Burton shows a stool and a staff in a nearly identical style, probably by the same hand; they are noted as a "stool and a staff of office of sub-chief Kafuiza."

Interestingly enough, the bowl figure in Figure 5 is in a style identified by Pierre de Maret as the Mwanza substyle

Left: 10. Luba chief displaying a staff and a lukasa memory board. Shaba region, 1989. Photo: Mary Nooter Roberts.

The objects are not merely aesthetic emblems of office but also are testimonies to inherited rights and privileges, and embodiments of spiritual benediction. The identity of the sculptor who made them is not generally discussed, and is not considered to be nearly as important as the processes of consecration that occur over the course of the objects' lifetimes.

Right: 11. Female *kashakesheke* diviner with her divining instrument. Shaba region, 1989. Photo: Mary Nooter Roberts.

The diviner conceived her divining instrument in a dream, which she then conveyed to an artist who made the sculpture according to her specifications. The owner openly pronounced and explained the name of the spirit that the figure is said to embody, but she did not reveal the artist's name or speak of his identity. The creation of a work of art through a dream demonstrates transpersonal creativity at work.

of the Shankadi complex (de Maret et al. 1976). We can attribute at least seven other bowl figures to this substyle. Two are in Tervuren, three are recorded in Tervuren's archives as being in private collections, and one is in Johannesburg. One colonial report claims the bowl figures were made under missionary guidance at the Protestant mission at Mwanza, although Joseph Maes stated



Left: 12. Mwadi female spirit medium. Shaba region, 1970s. Photo: Thomas Q. Reefe.

Some Luba persons attribute the form of *lukasa* memory boards, used for safeguarding royal history, to Mwadi spirit mediums. Gender lines become blurred in Luba creative processes, for while the actual carving is done by a male member of the Mbudye association, the form is inspired by a dream of a Mwadi, who is the physical and spiritual embodiment of a deceased king and a symbol of continuity between the ancient past and the lived present, and between men's and women's powers.

Right: 13. An artist displays a sculpted wooden staff made at the site of a forge for blacksmithing, 1970s. Photo: Thomas Q. Reefe.

The arts of smithing and sculpting are often done by the same person, whose identity is linked to the founding culture heroes of Luba kingship who brought the technologies of smelting and smithing to Luba peoples.

that the corpus made for export was nevertheless based on earlier prototypes made for local consumption (1939:85), such as the bowl figure in Figure 6. It is conceivable, then, that Kitwa Biseke—and other Luba artists of that period—was sculpting both for local and foreign clients (Nettleton 1992:52–54).

The Shankadi artist most well known in the West is the so-called Master of the Cascade Headdress (Figs. 7, 9). Although



we do not know his actual name, we do know of approximately twenty works produced by him and his workshop during the nineteenth century in a distinctive and extremely creative style characterized by miniature human figures in asymmetrical poses, wearing dramatically cascading hairstyles. The hairstyles imitate actual coiffures worn by Luba women, documented in turn-of-the-century photographs and paintings (Fig. 8). In fact, the Master's headrests served to support the very hairstyles that are seen in the caryatids of these sculptures. The play on the idea of support and the inventive variations on a theme suggest that the artist was a self-confident and innovative producer of new forms, who departed from convention to assert a recognizable and appealing signature style (Vogel 1980:137).

Two headrests, one in the National Museum of Copenhagen and the other in a private collection (illustrated in Neyt 1994:185, 187), are closely related to the Cascade corpus but, as Ezio Bassani suggests (1976), they may be the work of a separate artist. Almost identical, each depicts two figures facing each other in a loose embrace. Their legs are dynamically opposed, with one stretching forward and the other tucked behind. One wears a cascade hairstyle, the other wears an

openwork cross-shaped coiffure; according to Luba spokespersons these were the two most popular fashions of the late nineteenth century. Documents suggest that the artists of this workshop may have lived near the kingdom of Kinkondja, although Luba people of Kinkondja to whom I showed photographs of these headrests in the 1980s were not able to assign a name to their maker.

That we have not yet been able to record the actual names of these artists and many other celebrated Luba masters may stem from two factors in addition to the mobility of art. The first is practical: the objects were mostly produced in the nineteenth century and removed from the Congo by the early twentieth, and the kingdom and its artistic patronage progressively declined by the turn of the century. How, then, can descendants be expected to remember these sculptures or to identify photographs of them as the products of a specific ancestor whom they did not know and whose works they never saw? Second, and more conceptually, field research suggests that remembrance of a particular artist is a component of memory transmission that is inseparable from the memory of the patron, the spirit medium that consecrated it, the spirit or person whom it



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portrays, and the original artist of the Luba epic that every subsequent artist is thought to incarnate and embody.

Objects That Articulate Knowledge

Given the sophisticated mnemonic traditions that Luba peoples have invented and used for several centuries to safeguard and generate other kinds of historical knowledge, it is clear that they could have found ways to remember artists, but chose not to make that a priority. Why? The answer has to do with their attitudes toward objects: as scholars have observed for many other African peoples (MacGaffey 1993; Blier 1995; Roberts & Roberts 1997; Vogel 1997), Luba attribute less importance to what objects *are* than to what they *do*, and espe-



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Left: 14. Figure. Luba, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Wood, cloth, iron; 13.7cm (5.4"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, and Anonymous Gifts in Memory of Vera de Vries, 1967 (1978.412.561).

This diminutive sculpted figure is laden with supernatural charges in the form of medicinal bundles around the base and on the head, which are "closed" by an iron pin. The pin represents a blacksmith's anvil, referred to by Luba peoples as "the secret of power and progress," and is said to "hold the spirit within."

Above: 15. Chief in the rich iron-producing district of Kiluwe near Ankoru, 1927–35. Photo: W.F.P. Burton. University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries, BPC 13.9.

The chief, documented by Burton as a blacksmith/sculptor, is shown here in his regalia and holding a carved staff of office and a figural headrest laden with beads and tacks. Considering the important role of blacksmithing in the founding of the Luba kingdom and the original culture hero's identity as a master blacksmith, it is not surprising that a chief would also be an artist.

cially how they allow their owners and users to articulate knowledge. Luba consider the aesthetic qualities of sculptures to be vehicles of spiritual efficacy, mnemonic recall, and ideological validation. Objects are made to express relationships and to make statements of political legitimacy. It is this active sense of the object that allows their works of art to function as mnemonic devices—visual images that stimulate, generate, and activate memory in the form of oral recitation and other performative media such as dance, song, and trance (Roberts & Roberts 1996).

Luba peoples describe memory as a string of beads, a metaphor that conveys the active, contingent, negotiable nature of memory (Roberts & Roberts 1996:29–33). Just as the elements of a beaded necklace

can be arranged in myriad ways, so is memory constantly subject to new configurations, in reaction to changing circumstances and alternative points of view. Luba works of art are visual devices that articulate connections, associations, and relationships among persons, places, and things in the past and in the ever evolving present. They provide a support for such articulations. In other words, the memory boards, stools, staffs, spears, axes, and bowls that Luba artists make are not ends in themselves but rather are frameworks, structures upon which their owners and users may fill in the historical details and map the signposts of memory. A staff of office, for example, is no mere emblem of prestige (Fig. 10). It is an actual testimonial, a legal record, and an embodiment of spiritual benediction. Staffs are used by chiefs in moments of political challenge or litigation to validate their position and to "prove" their rightful heritage (Nooter 1990; M. Roberts 1994; Roberts & Roberts 1996:162–74).

Most important, mnemonic devices that double as royal insignia are receptacles of spiritual power and invocation. Within these containers, fashioned as female figures according to the highest norms of cosmetic beautification and perfection, dwell the tutelary spirits of Luba kingship (M. Roberts forthcoming; Roberts & Roberts 1996: chap. 3). While the sculptor was responsible for making a container that would attract the spirits, it is often a separate specialist—a spirit medium, diviner, or chief—who consecrates it after production, and it is, likewise, often another person who envisions or conceives the object prior to bringing the commission to an artist. In other words, essential aspects of the objects' conception and creation

16. Luba diviner. Shaba region, 1988. Photo: Mary Nooter Roberts.

Just as all artists are incarnations of the original culture heroes Mbidi Kiluwe, Kalala Ilunga, and Kahasa Kansengo, the first blacksmith-artist, so are all diviners considered to be personifications of the first Luba diviner, Mijibu's Kalenga, who helped the first Luba king come to power. Identity for Luba professionals associated with chieftaincy and divination is often linked to a distant, originary past, which each successive generation is believed to reenact.

occur both before and after the sculptor's interventions, although without his mastery and his elevated aesthetic sensibility, the other stages of production and benediction would be unsuccessful.

From Conception to Consecration: Transpersonal Identity

Those whom I interviewed on the subject of artistic process and creativity invariably talked more about the consecration of the work by a spirit medium or the conception of the work through a dream on the part of the owner-to-be than about the sculptor himself. These transformations of identity, or porous and fluid relationships of identity, may go against a modernist sense of a prominent individual artistic identity, but they do not diminish the importance of the artist and the nuanced way that artistic creativity is perceived and performed by Luba peoples. Luba artists partake of a "transpersonal identity," a term also used in Hindu art history to describe the phenomenon whereby artists become subsumed by the larger network of relationships—both social and spiritual—of which they are a part (Shearer 1993:16, 17).

In one case, the owner of a staff of office, who used his staff to recount the entire genealogy of his lineage and to contain the most potent of spiritual and ancestral powers, explained that if the staff were ever lost or stolen, a new one would be commissioned from an artist. The replacement would be worth nothing, however, until taken to a sacred forest where the twin tutelary spirits of Luba kingship, named Mpanga and Banze, would consecrate and empower the staff to life. The named spirits are even depicted on the staff (Roberts 1994:24–32). In another case, a female diviner who was the owner of a *kashakesheke*, a figural divining instrument used for problem-solving, explained that she had dreamed of her figure, named Mpombo, in all of its physical detail (Fig. 11); then she conveyed her dream to an artist, who fashioned the image according to these oneirically ordained specifications.¹⁹ The name of the sculpture, not the name of the artist, was key to the owner.

In another case, the owners of a *lukasa* memory board used for the remembrance of royal histories recounted that a Mwadi spirit medium dreamed the form of the board and then dictated it to the artist (Fig.



12). Mwadi was the title of a woman who became possessed by a deceased king's spirit and went to reside in his former palace, where she perpetuated the memory of the king. She was in effect the king himself, and the new king paid homage to her in the form of gifts which he sent forth to her domain, called a "spirit capital" (Nooter 1991:271–76; M. Roberts forthcoming). That the Mwadi was responsible for the form of a *lukasa*, and that she could conceive its image through a dream, is indicative of the ways that Luba artistic identity may be permeable and porous, able to flow between individuals who collectively create a single work.

The examples of the Mwadi and the *kashakesheke* diviner demonstrate that even gender is permeable in Luba creative

processes. Although women do not participate directly in the professions of sculpting or blacksmithing, they nevertheless often serve as agents behind the conception of a work's form and iconography.²⁰ Through processes of transpersonal creativity, both the Mwadi and the diviner received the inspiration for the objects' forms through a dream, in much the same way that pregnant Luba women are visited in a dream by an ancestor whose name and identity the child will bear. The notion of a covert female dimension of artistic creativity is consistent with other aspects of Luba royal experience, in which men are the overt power holders but women are believed to be behind the scenes as advisors, ambassadors, and especially as spirit mediums (Nooter 1991: chap. 5;

Nooter 1992). Power is perceived to be ambiguously gendered, and creativity is the mechanism whereby women conceive kings through birth and incarnate them after death.

Forging Creativity

Just as Luba artistic creativity navigates across gender and professional divides, so does it cross temporal ones. Kingship and artistry become more enmeshed when we learn from the research of William Dewey and S. Terry Childs that most Luba wood sculptors were also blacksmiths, and blacksmiths played a critical role in the founding of the Luba kingdom (Fig. 13). Both Mbidi Kiluwe and Kalala Ilunga, the culture bearers of Luba kingship, were described in the royal epic as master blacksmiths who brought this technology to Luba peoples. In other accounts, upon his investiture as the first Luba king in Munza, a rich iron-producing district, Kalala was said to have summoned a man named Kahasa Kansengo to teach his people the art of smelting. Subordinate lineages were subsequently sent a bellows with instructions on its use, and many still claim that this event signaled the origin of their subchieftaincies. Indeed, the investiture process of kings is itself considered to be

a dramatization of forging: in a ceremony called "the beating of the anvils," the candidate-king sits upon a stool holding an axe and a double-headed spear while two dignitaries symbolically beat his knees to symbolize the act of creation, of forging a king (Dewey & Childs 1996). Luba peoples state that just as a blacksmith transforms raw metal into useful weapons and tools, so is a king transformed during his investiture from an ordinary person into a superhuman being.

The importance of blacksmithing as an art of transformative power is reinforced by every king's possession of weapons and tools that incorporate metal, and are considered to be copies of the original insignia and weapons carried by Mbidi Kiluwe himself. They include elegantly sculpted spears and axes, scepters and knives. Most significant, many of those iron insignia are adorned with tiny cone-shaped objects that are miniature representations of the blacksmith's anvil (Fig. 14). A Luba proverb states, "The anvil is the secret of power and progress," a reference both to the wealth implied by metalworking technologies and the more symbolic dimensions of ironworking as an art of transformation. Chiefs even wore these anvil-shaped hairpins in their coiffures, for Luba emphatically state that such pins serve to hold the spirit within.

The close association between kings and artists is reflected in some early archival photographs. Burton, for example, documented a high-ranking dignitary or chief who was also a renowned sculptor living in the rich iron-producing district of Kilulwe near Ankoro (Fig. 15). But when we lack documentation on names of particular artists, it is not because they were unrecognized but rather because their identities were interwoven with the larger identities of Mbidi Kiluwe, Kalala Ilunga, and Kahasa Kansengo, the first Luba blacksmith-artist, who is thought to be personified by every subsequent Luba artist. Just as all Luba diviners are incarnations of the first diviner, Mijibu'a Kalenga (Fig. 16), and all kings are personifications of Mbidi Kiluwe and Kalala

17. Investiture of a Luba chief. Shaba region, 1988. Photo: Mary Nooter Roberts.

All chiefs are considered to be manifestations of the first Luba king, Kalala Ilunga, and every investiture ceremony is a reenactment of the original series of events that led to Kalala's enthronement as recounted in the royal epic. Investiture rites include a ritual called "the beating of the anvils," in which a dignitary symbolically beats the knees of the chief to signify the "forging" of a ruler. Ironworking is a metaphor for the almost mystical abilities of rulers to incarnate the past and to perpetuate the past in the present.



llunga (Fig. 17), so too are all artists incarnations of these two culture heroes assisted by their blacksmith. Dewey and Childs found that when they posed questions about the lineages of particular smiths, people were able to recite extended historical genealogies.²¹ But unless prompted by specific questions, the local people showed less interest in the individuality of the smith than the ideological connections between kings and blacksmiths, rulership and artistic creativity. Luba concepts of originality are firmly rooted in antiquity, and insignia are tangible links to a distant originary past (William Dewey, personal communication, 1998).

Luba artists are valued less for their own individuality than for their ability to achieve efficacy and to articulate rela-

tionships that transcend in every way the boundaries of a modernist view of art. A Luba sense of art and the artist includes an approach to originality that comes from a social history of use, an accumulated genealogy of meaning, and especially from the secret powers that Luba confer upon art objects to harness and to hold the most powerful and ancient spiritual and ancestral forces. Every work of art is therefore a reworking and a rebirth of ancient ideas.

The dynamism of these processes of artistic exchange and circulating notions of identity may then in part explain the omissions of artists' names from the exhaustive mnemonic records that Luba continue to use to preserve and transmit their history. Like forging iron, creating

artistic identity is a process of transformation and change, permutation and alchemy. One person can dream an image that is created by another to be consecrated by a third before use by a fourth, and then appropriated by a fifth for exchange with a sixth, and on and on. This processual nature of the creation and use of Luba art in the precolonial period is not unlike the second part of the Luba story: the exchanges and negotiations that brought works of art to the West.

Symmetries of Appropriation

Most Luba art was taken from the Congo between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when travelers, members of antislavery campaigns and scientific expeditions, missionaries, and colonials began to penetrate the region. Objects were collected in a variety of ways—some purchased, some given as gifts, some seized, some traded in diplomacy. The important point is that the use of objects for the reification of political negotiations prior to colonialism also characterized the appropriation of those same works by foreigners; and frequently the naming of artists by foreigners reflects the permutations of ownership, authority, and intrigue in these objects' lives. Just as Thomas (1991) found a symmetry between indigenous appropriations of European artifacts and the colonial collecting of indigenous goods in the Pacific, which serves to break up the "us/them" oppositions, so one finds a process of naming at work in precolonial Luba contexts that is virtually mirrored when Luba objects enter Western circuits of object exchange.

An example of how complex and convoluted the picture became with colonial intervention is recounted by Allen Roberts (1985:108–13). The two Luba-style works shown in Figure 18, along with several others by the same hands, were commissioned by two related Tabwa chiefs, Chief Karsabala and Chief Lusinga, who resided on the periphery of the Luba kingdom and emulated central Luba kingship practices to reinforce their power during the middle of the nineteenth century. Although these eastern lineages had been relatively unstratified compared with the Luba heart-



18. Chiefly insignia (male-female pair). Luba/Tabwa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Wood, bark, cloth, iron, fiber cord, bushbuck horns, rock crystals, various natural substances; male 70cm (27.5"), female 56cm (22"). Africa-Museum, Tervuren, nos. 31663 and 31664.

This pair of Luba-style works, commissioned by two related Tabwa chiefs to augment their status, was collected in 1884 by Emile Storms, a Belgian administrator who went to the region as part of an antislavery campaign. Storms later gave the sculptures to the Africa-Museum. The story of these objects' ownership demonstrates the ways that works of art were used to legitimize political authority both in Luba precolonial contexts and later in colonial contexts of appropriation by Europeans.

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land, the mid- to late nineteenth century saw a time of new political consolidation, in which chieftaincies suddenly sought ways to organize and strengthen their authority through participation in the east African slave trade during the 1870s and 1880s. In fact, these two chiefs moved their chieftaincies from the eastern Luba periphery to the shores of Lake Tanganyika so they would be closer to Ujiji, the endpoint of the caravan trade to Zanzibar. Émile Storms, a Belgian administrator who went to the region in 1883 with an antislavery campaign, was confronted by Chief Lusinga. Storms awaited the arrival of a German expedition, and with that army he overtook Lusinga's chieftaincy and killed Lusinga. He and the German officer then seized the insignia belonging to both chiefs, which they ultimately deposited in the colonial museums of Tervuren and Berlin, respectively. In other words, the objects were seized from the treasuries of African monarchs to be deposited in the treasuries of European ones.

Accretions of Identity

The naming game often goes hand in hand with such struggles for appropriation and ownership, as demonstrated by the genealogy of names assigned to the artist of an outstanding corpus of works in an eastern Luba style (Cover, Figs. 19, 20). In the recent exhibition "Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History," co-curator Allen F. Roberts and I dedicated the entire last room of the exhibition to this sculptor to demonstrate the ways that objects and artists' identities may accumulate histories and names as they pass from one owner to another, and from one political domain to the next (Roberts & Roberts 1996:228).

This corpus of masterworks, consisting of three stools, several bow stands, two janus figures, one male figure, and a large half-figure, is most probably the work of a master and at least one apprentice. Susan Vogel describes a stool in the University Museum of Philadelphia (Cover) and a bow stand in the Monzino collection (Fig. 19) as "sharing a crystalline purity, a geometric regularity, and sharply-carved, almost diamond-hard scarification on the stomach" (Vogel 1986:125-26). The emphasis on stools and bow stands would suggest that this artist excelled in these specific object types and would not have made all of the items in a given treasury. The existence of so many works of the same type suggests that the sculptor was celebrated in his own time, highly valued by patrons of different chieftaincies for his elegant evocations of royal demeanor.

Two of the works, the Philadelphia stool and a janus figure in Berlin's Museum für Völkerkunde, were collected by the German ethnographer Leo Frobenius in 1904. He labeled both simply as "Warua" when they entered their museums, but he provided no particular detail

as to their geographic or ethnic origins. "Warua," a Swahili pronunciation of "Baluba," is the name Swahili traders gave to the Luba-related, mostly Hemba and Tabwa, peoples residing in the eastern zones of the kingdom during the late nineteenth century. Sculptures by this hand have since been described as creations of the "Frobenius Master" or "Frobenius's Warua Master," as published by Susan Vogel (1986:125-26) and Ezio Bassani (1989:265; 1992:274), both of whom have studied the stylistic attributes of works in this corpus. Recently François Neyt proposed a new name for this artist, the "Master of the Court of Sopola," mentioning Prince Sopola as a leader who pushed the limits of the Luba kingdom to the Luvua River. Yet there is limited documentation to support this attribution. Neyt himself states, "Hardly any of the works attributed to this anonymous master have been located" (1994:84).

Never in this genealogy of the name does one learn who the actual artist was or where he was from. What is learned is the history of the objects' ownership by foreigners. Because of a Western preoccupation with provenance, works are named and renamed in a game of nomenclature that reveals more about the West's history of commodifying objects than the history of the objects in question. Yet the masterworks by this hand are among the most compelling testimonies to one Luba artist's sculptural genius, as they reveal nuances of repetition and innovation from one work to another.

Silent Authorship and Luba Notions of Authenticity

It must be remembered that the sculptures by this master and others discussed here are considered to be the most potent emblems of Luba royal power and authority. They are not mere articles of status—they are repositories and wellsprings of sacred authority. The secrecy associated with many works of art in Africa is considered to be protective, discretionary, and power enhancing (Nooter 1993). Luba stools and bow stands are rarely intended for human eyes; the knowledge that inheres within them and the forces they contain are considered too dangerous. They must be kept hidden away in other villages, often swathed in white cloth. Stools are usually hereditary objects, passed from one generation to the next, as tangible links to a prestigious legacy of sacred rulership. They are literally "seats of power," microcosmic symbols of a Luba *kitenta*, or spirit capital—that is, a place joining a chief and his people to the ancestors and other spirits seeking to guide everyday affairs (Fig. 20). Such a seat situates power and memory in the past and present, and its subtle iconography can be read as a sculptural narrative (Roberts & Roberts 1996:154-62).

It would be both out of place and inappropriate in a Luba context to openly and publicly discuss the authorship of works possessing such covert and discreet powers.²² Stools are displayed only on the most exceptional occasions, such as the day of a king's investiture, whereas bow stands are never seen by anyone but the owner and the female titleholder, Kyabuta, who guards the emblem in a sacred shrine house. Furthermore, such objects are considered to be a direct inheritance from the culture heroes of Luba kingship, Mbidi Kiluwe and Kalala Ilunga. For Luba, the "authenticity" of these objects and other royal emblems such as staffs, spears, and axes resides in their derivation and descent from the ancient past. One titleholder explained:

In the beginning, Mbidi Kiluwe brought for his son Kalala Ilunga only one *kibango* royal staff. It is only there where the royal staff was left that power was localized. The many staffs that one sees these days scattered everywhere are imitations, copied from the first staff belonging to Kalala Ilunga. His children have tried to adapt their own histories and have adopted this insignia. In reality, the staffs owned by different titleholders are used to render themselves more prestigious and powerful and so give themselves more "weight," in memory of the first original staff.

(in M. Roberts 1994:24)

Luba officials validate authority by reference to a set of original emblems more valuable than the many "copies," "imitations," and re-creations that have followed. Value is determined by the rarity and antiquity of the truly authentic originals. Luba secrecy reflects a respect for the sacred and the old, and the effacing of authorship preserves the sanctity of the work and enhances its sacred aura. Although an artist is a mortal, representing a temporal reality, his work has a timeless significance and can outlive generations of mortals to effect spiritual transcendence itself.

Authorizing Authenticity: The Buli Master

The mechanisms for the construction of value and authenticity in Luba culture are not dissimilar from those in the West, though the ultimate goals differ greatly. For Luba peoples, the "authenticity" of insignia serves to validate and legitimize political authority; in the West, authenticity is linked to the market—itsself a vehicle of power and authority, but not always with explicitly political motivations. In the art market, determining authenticity reflects a well-developed strategy to define value by scarcity and age. A small number of works by an early master will

19. Bow stand. Luba, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Wood, metal; 64.5cm (25.4"). Collection of Carlo Monzino.

The artist known in the West as "Frobenius's Warua Master" sculpted bow stands for kings and chiefs throughout the Luba region. He had a genius for combining an organic rendering of the human form with the symmetry and geometry of patterned branches. While each bow stand is unique, the known examples have features in common. The gesture of hands to breasts refers to the Luba belief that certain women guard the secrets of royalty within their breasts.

always be worth more than a larger, later corpus. And the ability to assign a name and a location to an artist is worth more than anonymity. The history of research on the Buli Master, later identified by Louis de Strycker and François Neyt as Ngongo ya Chintu (Neyt 1994:216-17), reflects the ways that naming plays a role in strategies of authentication.

Ever since Olbrechts's identification of several works in the "long-faced style" and his assignation of the name "the Buli Master" to the anonymous producer of the corpus (Olbrechts 1947:71-74), scholars such as William Fagg, Vogel, de Strycker, and Neyt have grappled with different aspects of the artist's elusive identity. Over the course of the last fifty years, the sculptures by this hand (or hands) have attained an almost mythological importance. The style represents an alternative vision that goes beyond the conventions and norms of Luba and Hemba arts, while nevertheless deriving from them (Figs. 3, 21). Vogel described this alternative style as reflecting a pathos associated with the decline of the Luba kingdom at the end of the nineteenth century, and argued for the existence of a single master (Vogel 1980:142). Some owners of Buli works reject such a late date, for that would imply a "decadence" connected with the beginnings of foreign contact and the decline of the precolonial Luba kingdom.²³ As the corpus has grown over the years, now totaling nineteen documented objects, and as these have changed hands, been sold and acquired, scholars have debated, first, whether there was a single Buli Master or an early master followed by one or more later disciples, and second, when the works were made. The most recent assertion is that there were two masters, the first a far superior sculptor working in the mid-1800s, and a second producing later in the century (Pirat 1996).

Mirroring the debates about the number of Buli Masters is an equally ambiguous understanding of the ethnic *mélange* of which these works were a part. Are Luba and Hemba two ethnicities or one? Although the region where the artist is thought to have lived is in the so-called Hemba region, Hemba in fact simply means "the people to the east," and was probably a Luba sobriquet for their eastern cousins (A. Roberts 1985:6). According

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to Maesen, the Hemba were Luba peoples residing on the opposite side of the Lualaba River who appropriated the name during the colonial period to consolidate power and to distinguish themselves from their stronger and more populous Luba neighbors (personal communication, 1988; M. Roberts forthcoming). De Strycker and Bernard de Grunne (1996:50-52) provide detailed historical data gleaned from colonial documents, diaries, and conversations with the descendants of collectors of some of these Buli-style works to show how the sculptures reflect complex interactions between the artist's own lineage and those of his

patrons. The area where the sculptor is thought to have worked was a crossroads between the Luba and Hemba regions, and his probable patronage by chiefs on both sides of the Lualaba River would explain why he created standing male portrait figures with Hemba characteristics, kneeling caryatids and bowl bearers that are more typical of Luba artistic production, and still other sculptures that combine aspects of both styles in an idiosyncratic blend (Fig. 21).

In spite of these new data, we still do not know the artist's actual name, for Ngongo ya Chintu turns out to be a generic nickname for artists, and Buli was

This page:

20. Stool, Luba, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Wood, 48.9cm (19.25"). Private collection.

It remains unclear whether the so-called Warua Master made stools and bow stands for different clients or multiples for a single ruler to be used for gift-giving. But the fact that examples of his work were collected over a widespread area suggests that he was highly valued by patrons in his own time. Of three stools known by this hand, this one was collected most recently, in the 1970s, and its surface shows many years of use. Stools are both literally and metaphorically "seats" of power and receptacles of the most potent spiritual energies, and they are kept hidden away from public view most of the time.

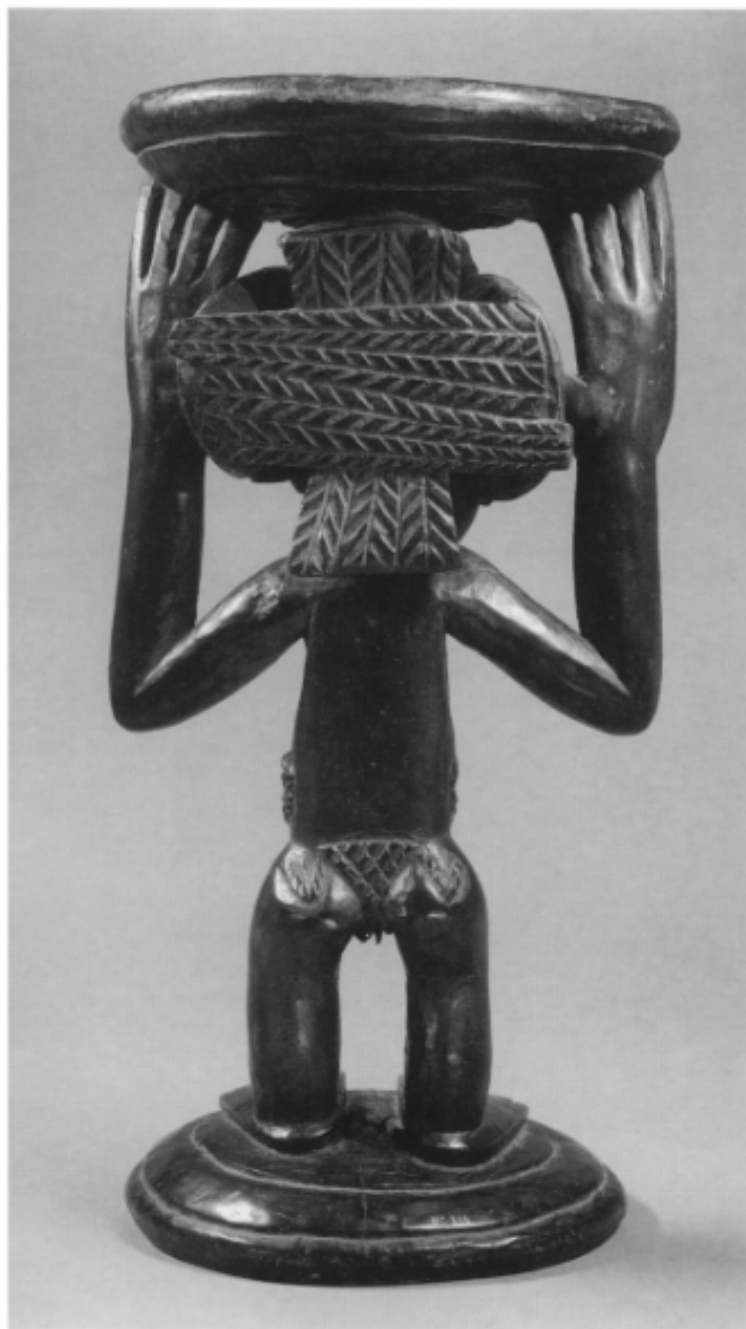
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21. Back and side views of the stool in Figure 3.

The kneeling woman supporting a stool is a typically Luba genre, while the standing male portrait figure is characteristic of Hemba art. This sculptor, known as the Buli Master, combined Luba and Hemba elements by carving a stool whose caryatid in the form of a standing female figure bears a closer stylistic resemblance to Hemba than to Luba art. While the artist himself resided in a village called Kateba, located in the Hemba region, he sculpted for both Luba and Hemba patrons. The names Luba and Hemba are themselves invented attributions, however, for Luba and Hemba clans constitute a single amorphous ethnic mix of peoples formerly affiliated with the "Luba" kingdom. Equally ambiguous is whether there was a single Buli Master or an early master working in the mid-1800s who was succeeded by others working toward the latter half of the century. These are the puzzles of an art history that seeks to challenge monolithic assumptions of artistic identity in order to understand alternative cultural constructions of authorship.

the place where only two of the nineteen objects in the corpus were collected. De Strycker and de Grunne therefore propose a new name, "the Master of Kateba," which they assert more correctly designates the town where the artist spent the greater portion of his life (1996:51). The historiography of the Buli Master epitomizes the imbrication of identity that characterizes the accumulations of ethnic and kin relations prior to colonialism, superimposed by further attributions during and since colonialism. The Buli Master has become a metaphor for the layering of names and interpretations upon an absent referent. As David Morgan puts it, "Communities of viewers appropriate the image and remake it after themselves....even transforming the artist himself..." (1998:134).

These accounts demonstrate "processual identity" at work, the accumulation of histories and names that some objects acquire in their trajectory from Africa to the West. Like a pawn in a chess game, an artwork may become a device of negotiable transaction in much the same way that objects were manipulated by Luba rulers in their own precolonial political dramas. The artist's name in Luba art history has been as arbitrary as all signs are. One could modify the words of René Magritte just slightly: "An artist is not tied so much to his name that one could



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not find for him another that would suit him better." Magritte goes on to say that "a name often serves only to designate itself" (in Dopagne 1977: n.p.). Artists' names may be invented to accommodate changes in scholarship, to increase an object's value, or simply to assist with identification; but the name may say more about the person who gives it than the person it is meant to represent.

In the end, beyond and outside of these naming games, these unnamed artists are nevertheless knowable. Though their original names have not come down to us, their originality—in the Luba sense of the word—certainly has, and the works they

made continue to invoke histories for Luba peoples today as well as for foreign owners and users. Though these artists may serve to reify the products of other peoples' dreams or provide the apparatus of other peoples' power, though they may be superseded by spirit mediums who activate their forms or be omitted from the annals of colonial reportage, though they may forge iron in the name and memory of the originary Luba culture bearers, they are never anonymous. But to determine who and what "art" and "artists" mean for different peoples and periods of history is what makes art history a critical field. That a modernist notion of art might be

shaken, expanded, or transformed by a Luba sense of transpersonal, processual identity; that one's own cultural assumptions might be suspended for just a moment to consider the possibility of alternative value systems and different notions of self and society, originality, and artistic identity—this is what the study of African art can offer, and these are the ways Luba artists continue to activate thought and to articulate relationships and values. Their works fulfill ongoing roles as vehicles of memory and knowledge, and as supports for the vicissitudes of changing historical circumstances. □

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HELDMAN: *Notes, from page 55*

Much of the material in this article is taken from my 1994 monograph on Fré Seyoum. I wish to thank Diana Spencer and Francis Andray for permission to publish their photographs, and Jeff Allison for his resolution of a computing disaster. I am grateful for Professor Getatchew's translations of the major inscriptions in this article.

1. Written communication, May 5, 1995.
2. In highland Christian Ethiopia there was little interest in painting beyond the religious sphere. Portraits of nobles and royal patrons grace devotional images and adorn manuscripts of religious texts, church walls, and processional crosses. The decoration of reception halls of palaces and perhaps other secular structures was apparently limited to imported luxury fabrics, such as patterned silks (Fernuchan 1893:118).
3. The art of the Byzantine empire and the Greek Orthodox Church frequently provided models for the arts of the other Eastern Churches.
4. The Ge'ez term for all painted or engraved images is *śrat*, meaning "image" or "picture."
5. Compare with Isaiah 63: "Holy, Holy, Holy is Lord of Sabaoth, the heavens and earth are full of Thy glory." This passage from Isaiah is used as a hymn in the Christian liturgies. For a more complete discussion see Heldman 1994:29, n. 9.
6. Literacy was the privilege of the nobility and the priestly class; furthermore, Ge'ez, the literary language of the Ethiopian Church, ceased to be spoken by the twelfth or thirteenth century and was incomprehensible to the uneducated peasantry.
7. Takla Māryām is the name he assumed when he took his vows. See Budge 1898:31-34.
8. Qiso Asteraye T. Nigatu, written communication, May 5, 1995.
9. The inscription in the upper margin reads, "Picture of Our Lady Mary with her Beloved Son." Below the figure of Emperor Dəwīt an inscription reads, "Picture of King Dəwīt whose faith is pure." Note of this manuscript was first published by Diana Spencer (1967). This portrait of Mary probably follows the iconography of Dəwīt's palace icon, no longer extant, which he used for his daily private devotions; see Getatchew 1983a. This collection of Marian tales of diverse origins had been translated from Arabic (the language of Egyptian Christians) to Ge'ez, the literary language of the Ethiopian Church, during the reign of Emperor Dəwīt (Cerulli 1943).
10. Constantinople was also conceived as a "New Jerusalem" (Sherrard 1985:79 *passim*).
11. This elegant gesture has a long history in European painting; see Wahl 1980:81.
12. I do not mean to suggest that the use of devotional images was unknown in Ethiopia until this time. Iconic portraits of the saints in manuscripts of the fourteenth century are inscribed with prayers to the saints, and iconic portraits inscribed with prayers appear in pre-fifteenth-century murals. A portrait of St. Mercurius slaying Julian the Apostate in the late-thirteenth-century church of Geresata Māryām is inscribed, "Saint Mercurius, martyr of Christ, pray and supplicate for Yekunno Amlik and Nefiso Balzesos. Amen." Other iconic portraits in the same church are inscribed more generally, as in "St. Cyriacus, martyr of Christ, pray and supplicate for us" (Heldman & Getatchew 1987:5). There are, to my knowledge, no extant Ethiopian devotional images in the form of wooden panel painting from a time earlier than the reign of Zar'a Yā'eqob.
13. For a summary of the great contribution made by Zar'a Yā'eqob to the literature of the Ethiopian church, see the essay "Ethiopic Literature" by Getatchew Haile in Heldman et al. 1993:49-51; see also Getatchew 1992 and 1981:99-100. John Meyendorff (1986:67) has observed that in the Byzantine

East, not only monks and clerics but also laymen, including emperors and civil officials, could compose and publish theological treatises. This was the case in Ethiopia as well.

14. In addition to Michael and Gabriel, who stand beside Mary, there are Rufa'el, Uta'el, Fira'el, Saqa'el and Rāmu'el. Getatchew Haile (letter, April 1984) noted that this list follows EMBL no. 204, ff. 10r-v, a manuscript dated A.D. 1966-67, which is a direct copy of the original Horologium of Abba Giyorgis still preserved at his monastery at Gaseck (Macomber 1975:213; Getatchew & Macomber 1981:379-80).
15. This composition combines several incidents from the prolix reading for the commemoration of the feast of the Covenant of Mercy that was added to the Ethiopian Synaxary when it was revised circa 1563 (Colin 1992:406, 550-57). The reading tells how the angels would take Mary to heaven where she would see her Son enthroned and King David, and it also says that when Mary prayed to her Son on 16 Yakkatit at Golgotha, asking him to reward those who pray and do good works in her name, he came to her saying he would grant her wish.
16. The term "Frank" means not just the French, but all Europeans.
17. See the discussion of the account of the stolen painting by Truscello that was owned by Prince Sem'on (Heldman 1998:139-40).
18. The act of signing one's name upon a finished work did not imply being in possession of artistic genius. The concept of an artist or musician having divine force or genius and thus claiming higher social status did not begin to develop in western Europe until the fifteenth century and may be attributed to the revival of Neoplatonic philosophy (Martindale 1972:97-104; Pelles 1963:20-22).
19. Brief inscriptions of supplication which include the mural painter's name are frequently found in provincial churches of Crete during the fourteenth century (Kalopissi-Verti 1994:144, 150-51).
20. Because virtually no work has been done on collecting scribal signatures and colophons in Ethiopic manuscript, the frequency with which they occur is undocumented.

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ROBERTS: *Notes, from page 73*

This article has been modified and expanded from a paper originally prepared for "Individuality and Creativity in African Art: A Cross-Cultural Comparison," a symposium organized by Alisa LaGamma for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in conjunction with its exhibition "Master Hand: Individuality and Creativity among Yoruba Sculptors" held in 1997-98. I wish to thank Alisa for the invitation to participate in the symposium and also for inspired conversations with her during the development of this article. I am also grateful to Allen Roberts for his comments and suggestions. This paper is dedicated to Sid, Seth, Avery, and Al, and to our parents, Robert and Nancy Nozter.

1. Pre-doctoral fieldwork and archival research in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) and Belgium was made possible by the generous support of the following agencies: the American Foundation of University Women (1986-87), the Werner-Green Foundation for Anthropological Research (1987), the Belgian-American Educational Foundation (1987-88), and Columbia University (1987-88). I also wish to thank my affiliations, the Institut des Musées Nationaux du Zaïre, the Africa-Museum, Tervuren, and the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C., where I spent one year in residence as a pre-Doctoral Fellow (1989-90), culminating in the traveling exhibition (1996-98) and book *Maryam: Luba Art and the Making of History*, which I co-authored with Allen F. Roberts (Roberts & Roberts 1996). The exhibition program was sponsored by the Museum for African Art in New York and was generously funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the New York Council on the Humanities.
2. I wish to thank Huguste Van Geluwe and the late Albert Maesen of the Section of Ethnography, Africa-Museum, Tervuren, for allowing me to use the archives of Luba art, literature, and documentation during 1982 and again in 1988-89, when I was a Belgian-American Educational Foundation Fellow.
3. An entire journal is dedicated to issues of naming: *Naming: A Journal of Onomastics*.
4. It is worth considering whether the exceptionalism of the Yoruba case may relate in part to the fact that well before the arrival of colonialism, Yoruba culture had one of the earliest capitalist economies in Africa, with highly developed urban centers and market systems. In the West the modernist notion of gathered artifacts and the importance of the individual artist has developed hand in hand with an emerging capitalist "system of objects" since the nineteenth century (Baughnill and

Clifford 1985:239; A. Roberts, personal communication, 1988).

5. Wyatt MacGaffey has discussed how time for many Bantu-speaking peoples was a spiral until it was "flattened" by colonialism and the introduction of Western paradigms such as capitalism (MacGaffey 1983:128-29).

6. This phrase is adapted from Biebucyk (cited in A. Roberts 1985:5), who discusses the ways that African ethnic denominations recognized or conceived in the colonial period fail to reflect the "complex imbrication of human populations."

7. For more about the historical development of the concepts of culture and art, see Clifford 1988:232-36. Also see Roberts, Vogel & Müller 1994 for a discussion of different cultural approaches to object collection, preservation, and value.

8. The role of display in the construction of these categories was the focus of an exhibition and book titled *ARTifact*, held at New York's Center (now Museum) for African Art (Vogel 1989).

9. For more on processes of Luba cultural appropriation, see Nooter 1992.

10. It is not surprising that Luba art should be the first style in African art for which an artist was located. Luba art has always been valued in the West as one of the most "naturalistic," "sophisticated," and "refined" of African art styles, the type that would be featured in an exhibition whose goal was to prove that African art is "art" and not mere "artifact" (Vogel 1989).

11. Use of the term "entangled" comes from Nicholas Thomas's insightful analysis of Pacific Islands artistic exchange and colonialism (1991).

12. A compelling example of the degree to which indigenous African arts and artists are affected and transformed by foreign contact can be found in Schildkrout & Keim 1990.

13. For more on objects' ineluctable origins, see "Does an Object Have a Life?" in Roberts, Vogel & Müller 1994.

14. "Collecting histories" was the name of the last gallery in "Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History." The exhibition examined the layerings of identity and interpretation that objects acquire like a thick patina of history and experience (see Roberts & Roberts 1996).

15. This term was used by Arjun Appadurai during a lecture series he conducted for the University of Iowa in 1996.

16. One Luba spokesperson, the son of a renowned artist from the Kinkondjo area, recounted how, in the early twentieth century, powerful chiefs and kings traveled to Kinkondjo from the royal capitals of Kabongo and Kasongo Niembo just to commission stools from his father (Nooter 1993:41 citing interview with Ngoy Wefingwa Kabake, 1987).

17. Another group of Luba objects was given to the Africa-Museum, Tervuren, by Pezzer, and are discussed by Pierre Petit (1995). Pezzer's writings were greatly valued by his Belgian contemporaries, including Frans Olbrechts, who analyzed himself on Pezzer's fieldnotes when discussing Luba art (Petridis, personal communication, 1996).

18. Maren also reported that many of the eastern Luba artists he encountered in the 1950s were handicapped (personal communication, 1988), and Allen Roberts made the same observation among neighboring Tabwa peoples in the 1970s (personal communication, 1997).

19. For more on *kashokshete* divination techniques, see Nooter 1991:191-98 and Roberts & Roberts 1996:382-85.

20. For more on the ambiguous gendering of power in Luba culture, and the role of women in Luba art and politics, see Roberts 1992 and M. Roberts forthcoming.

21. Virtually all Luba people of a certain age and erudition can recite genealogies when asked to do so about different forebears, lineages, or chiefships. The question is whether the blacksmith genealogies are of a particular nature that would distinguish artists from other categories of ancestors. Judging from the data at present, they are generic family genealogies.

22. Susan Vogel has made this point with regard to Baule artworks that are spirit containers. One would never point to a person in a village to identify him as the artist of a mask that is the embodiment of a spirit.

23. The idea that African contacts with colonials and other foreigners polluted a "pristine" precolonial past is one of the misconceptions on the part of outsiders that many recent studies have tried to correct. Contact with foreigners, and the creative ramifications of these encounters, is central to understanding the resilience of African artistic creativity—prior to, during, and since colonialism.

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contributors

articles

MARILYN E. HELDMAN, an independent scholar in St. Louis, was a curator of the exhibition "African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia." She is currently working on a book on the thirteenth-century dynastic church of Emperor Yekunno Amlak, founder of Ethiopia's Solomonic dynasty.

ALISA LaGAMMA is Assistant Curator in the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. She spent 1993 in Gabon and the Republic of the Congo conducting research for her doctorate in African art history and archaeology, which she received from Columbia University in 1995.

MARY NOOTER ROBERTS, current President of ACASA and a Consulting Editor of *African Arts*, was for ten years Senior Curator at the Museum for African Art in New York City. Her 1996 book, *Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History* (with Allen F. Roberts), won the College Art Association's Alfred J. Barr Award for museum scholarship. She is presently working toward a major book and exhibition on Senegalese Sufi arts, and has recently conducted research on African communities in India.

ROSLYN ADELE WALKER, a specialist in Yoruba art, was a curator at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., before her appointment as Director in 1997.

departments

LISA ARONSON is Associate Professor and Director of Art History in the Department of Art and Art History, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, as well as a Consulting Editor of *African Arts*. She was recently a Research Fellow at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

ANDREA D. BARNWELL is a MacArthur Fellow in the department of Twentieth Century Painting and Sculpture, The Art Institute of Chicago.

EMILY HANNA-VERGARA is Assistant Professor of Art History at Georgia State University in Atlanta, and serves as Guest Curator of African Art at the High Museum of Art.

ELIZABETH HARNEY recently received her Ph.D. as a Commonwealth Scholar at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She is currently a Post-doctoral Fellow at New York University, preparing a book on post-Independence Senegalese arts.

SHANNEN HILL is a Ph.D. candidate in art history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She was formerly Junior Lecturer in the History of Art at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

SUZANNE H. MacRAE teaches English and humanities, including African literature and film, at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. Her publications have appeared in *Research in African Literatures*, *Motaz*, *African American Review*, and elsewhere.

DANIEL MATO is Professor of Art History at the University of Calgary.

JOSEPH NEVADOMSKY is Professor of Anthropology at California State University, Fullerton and Lecturer in African Art History at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. He is also a Consulting Editor of *African Arts*.

OLU OGUIBE is Stuart Goding Endowed Chair in the Arts of Africa and the African Diaspora at the University of South Florida in Tampa. He is currently at work on a book on contemporary African art for the Oxford History of Art series as well as *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, edited with Okwui Enwezor.

NORMA ROSEN, an Olokun priestess, has taught at San Diego State University and the University of Benin. She lives in Long Beach, California, where she heads her own textile firm.

DEBORAH STOKES, an M.A. candidate in museum studies at Columbia College in Chicago, did field research in Nigeria in 1979, 1980, and 1981. She co-compiled the William B. Fagg Photographic Archive in 1995 and recently created a two-volume database of the African beadwork collection at the Field Museum in Chicago.

Z. S. STROTHER is Assistant Professor of African Art History at Columbia University in New York and author of *Inventing Masks: Agency and History in the Art of the Central Fante* (University of Chicago Press, 1996).

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