

Known Artists but Anonymous Works

Fieldwork and Art History

SUSAN MULLIN VOGEL

We have come to a watershed in the study of African artists. Streams of information from many divergent sources in the field have gathered over time, have multiplied and grown, running together to form a deep body that, reexamined as a whole, yields some surprising consistencies. The paradox expressed in the title above emerges in virtually all the in-depth field studies of artists in Africa: in their own societies, African artists are known and even famous, but their names are rarely preserved in connection with specific works of art they have made.¹ Can this be established as a research finding? Why was it not recognized as such before? How widespread is it? What might this reveal about concepts of the artist and the creative process—and about the nature of the art object? What paths does it indicate for the discipline of African art history?

Since the 1940s African art history has followed methodologies similar to those used in Greek and Medieval to early Renaissance art history—among others.² On stylistic and documentary grounds, scholars identify the hand of an individual master and assemble an oeuvre, identifying the artist by a name of convenience until a personal name comes to light (e.g., "The Master of Flémalle" is now thought to have

been Robert Campin).³ African art history painstakingly assembles the oeuvre of individual African artists while recognizing that this exercise is not one that would normally have been practiced or have been meaningful in the African societies where these artists worked (as was likely the case in Medieval cultures as well).

Despite its emergence in many different studies, the paradox of the well-known artist with unattributed works has generally been seen as a research flaw or problem rather than a research finding or conclusion. As John Picton has put it, in reference to Yoruba art: "...the memory of artistry is preserved but with no means of relating that memory to material artifacts; but it is a problem that will need to be addressed" (1994:5). Since a negative hypothesis can never be proved, it has seemed reasonable to assume that more, or better, record keeping would produce the missing artists' names. Over the past fifty years, however, a relatively large number of thorough, highly motivated, and qualified researchers have sought information on artists, and most report this same lacuna while succeeding in collecting other kinds of data about artists (their working techniques, practices, training) and about objects (their names, meaning, uses, symbolisms, etc.). I would argue that, because cultures preserve the knowledge they value, any information that has so consistently eluded researchers should be taken to indicate areas of little or no cultural relevance to the people under study. Had the artists' works been known but the information withheld

from researchers (which I do not believe), one would still have to conclude that artists were not publicly named as the authors of particular artworks.

Authorship as an Attribute of the Artwork

Baule and other African patrons who traveled long distances to procure sculptures by given artists generally did so because they were assured of getting—not because they wanted to own a work of art by a particular artist, as a Western collector might. Authorship *per se* is seldom a significant attribute of the artwork in its original African context, in sharp contrast to Western art history and collecting where the artist's name is the first and most central attribute. How often is a work referred to simply as "a Cézanne"

All sculptures illustrated in this article were made by Baule artists in Ivory Coast. Objects shown in color, and the jar in Figure 11, are exhibited in "Baule: African Art/Western Eyes," currently on view at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution. The exhibition was curated by Susan Vogel and organized by the Yale University Art Gallery in collaboration with the Museum for African Art, New York.

1. Moon mask. Wood, 21cm (8.3"). Collection of William W. Brill.

The Mbilo entertainment masks illustrated here and in Figure 3 show the kinds of personal interpretations individual artists bring to a rigidly defined object type.

Commentaries on this article, solicited by the Dialogue Editor, will be published in a future issue.





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2. Gong mallet. Wood, cloth; length 23cm (9.1").
Collection of Jennifer Pinto Safian, New York.
Baule trance diviners (*komyen*) usually performed
with accessories like this mallet. No one may ask
the names of the artists who made them.

or "a Botticelli" rather than as "a landscape" or "a Madonna?" In the original setting, the name of an African artist, in fact, is usually linked only loosely with the objects he has made, even the most public of them. This information dissipates with time, not because it is secret but because no special effort is made to preserve it. More often than not, the African sculptor becomes virtually irrelevant to the life of the art object once his work is complete. There is much evidence that fine works of art were highly valued, but there is no evidence that their value attached to the fact of their authorship. (Compare this with the Western art market, where value is directly related to verifiable authorship, so that even an immature or mediocre work by an acclaimed artist has market value and art historical significance apart from its success as art.)

Essentially, the very concept of authorship in African art (and in Roman, Medieval, and most world art traditions) differs from the contemporary idea of the sculptor as the object's main creator. Field studies stress that it is relatively easy to discover many other names associated with the art object: the name of the spirit or god served by the work; the personal name of the sculpture; the name of the individual or group who owns or commissioned the piece; and above all, diviners, and priests who activate it. These people may be considered to be its makers, for they play key roles in making the object what it is. Many works of art become animate, capable of action in



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the sense that their presence, when consecrated, allows things to happen. The person responsible for consecrating the object may thus be more essential than the carver, since the unconsecrated object would not "work"; it would only be a hollow form.

The art object's location in a web of connections is more significant than its identity as part of the artist's oeuvre. More durably and tangibly, the object will be attached to a known private owner or to a communal group or shrine which maintains the work's essential identity. Finally, it may belong to a ritual, architectural, or regalia ensemble, as well as a lin-

eage of objects that have the same name, each made to replace its decayed predecessor. All of these attributes of the work of art are likely to be more widely known and carefully remembered than its ascription to a particular artist.

The Context of Western Politics and Scholarship

The anonymity of African artworks (not artists) has been noted all along in the literature. Nonetheless, a spate of anthologies on the artist, tradition, and individual creativity in Africa appeared during the 1960s and early '70s.⁴ And in the years fol-



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3. Moon mask. Wood, 22.5cm (8.9"). Collection of W. and U. Horstmann.

lowing, I and many other researchers set out to study individual artists and aesthetics, and to emphasize their importance. In recent years, however, with the notable exceptions of the "Master Hand" symposium at the Metropolitan and *The Yoruba Artist* (Abiodun, Drewal & Pemberton 1994), far less attention has been devoted to the artist.⁵ One reason may be that a less directive style of fieldwork has tended to collect data primarily of concern to informants—and this topic was not

among the most pressing (except among artists!). Inquiries specifically about artists (Himmelheber's, Fischer's, and Homburger's are among the earliest and most sustained) naturally produced much fuller information about them.

The other reasons may be found in the intellectual and political contexts of the original scholarship. In the United States the study of African art *as art* has been more or less dominated by two different objectives, appearing in two overlapping phases: the first of discovery, beginning around 1915, and the second of justification, beginning around mid-century.⁶ These are now largely completed, and

the field seems to be at the beginning of a third phase marked by broadening perspectives. The desire for justification gained importance during the 1950s and '60s, as major art institutions and individuals invested more of their fortunes and reputations in African art, and as pioneers in universities and museums argued for the inclusion of African art in the corpus of world art.

Significantly, the late '60s was also the period in which America's simmering racial tensions erupted dramatically, with inevitable impact on the study of African art. In this charged context it was less possible than ever to create apolitical exhibi-

4. Goli dancer at a funeral. New Kami, 1994. Photo: Susan Vogel.

The character represented is the goat-faced Kpan Pre. The most important aspect of the performance is the dance, not the mask.

tions or publications, and many professional Africanists became advocates for the material they studied. During the 1970s a generation of professors and curators was trained, often young people who had lived in Africa and had a deep personal commitment to the continent. They—or rather we, for at that time I became the Metropolitan Museum's first curator of African art—were often motivated by an explicit desire to justify the inclusion of African art in the art institutions in which we worked.⁷

For these scholars and curators, it seemed necessary to establish that African art had the basic qualities of other fully accepted art traditions, none more prestigious than European art of the Renaissance and later. They (or we) were eager to contradict the stereotype of an art that emanated almost unconsciously from a collective culture, anonymous and devoid of history—a notion of sub-Saharan Africa that had left it outside the history of art to which art museums and art history departments were dedicated. Above all, it was important to establish the work of art as an autonomous object of aesthetic contemplation and the artist as a creative individual with total control of his tools and materials. The relationship between tradition and creativity was a central issue.

With the zeal of missionaries, we did field research on artists, collecting evidence of individual creativity and local aesthetic criteria. It was important to document African masks and sculptures as richly meaningful symbolic objects made with training and knowledge, like those in the European canon. Papers and articles on African art frequently cited Irwin Panofsky, and later Michael Baxandall, associating the study of African art with that of Renaissance art. Little matter that perhaps a majority of the artworks exhibited in the Metropolitan Museum and taught in most art history departments had been created in contexts much closer to the African one than to the Renaissance model. Chinese bronzes, Egyptian tomb sculptures, Greek vases, Medieval ivories, French furniture, Tiffany windows, virtually all religious art, many drawings, wax and clay studies, and a dozen other things—being well established in the canon of world art, and less charged with contemporary racial politics—were automatically accepted, while many curators and professors maintained that African objects were not really art.⁸

My own work was typical of the movement to justify African art in academic art history and fine art museums. One of my early exhibitions at the Metro-



politan Museum was "The Buli Master: An African Artist of the 19th Century,"⁹ which named and celebrated an individual hand in 1980. There were both scholarly and political reasons to present African art like Greek or Medieval art—the Metropolitan had just spent a record amount to acquire a stool by the Buli Master, and a substantial "one-man show" for a traditional African master had never been held. This artist, considered comparatively "old," could uphold the message announced in the title: Africa, too, had old masters.

The final years of the twentieth century have witnessed a broad acceptance of African art as one of the great artistic achievements of humankind: its place in the canon now seems assured. It may not be to everyone's liking, but virtually all the leading American art institutions that

might be expected to commit to African art in their programs have done so.¹⁰ We now seem to be entering a third phase, free from the need to claim for African art the qualities of the European art tradition and liberated to reclaim for Africa some of its own singularity.

Baule Artists

Whenever I asked Baule *komyen*, or trance diviners, they were willing to tell me who had carved their sculptures. Some could not produce the artist's full name, but they usually remembered his given name or the name of his village. This was true of works they had commissioned themselves; most did not know who had made inherited objects. I noticed, however, that artists' names were rarely, if ever, volunteered by any of the owners of objects,



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5. *Bo nun amuin* mask with five horns, "The Albino." Wood, length 84.4cm (33.2"). The Museum for African Art, New York, Gift of Helen and Robert Kuhn.

These men's masks, whose name means "gods in (or of) the bush," appear in fearsome spectacles featuring violent behavior and magical feats. Because they are sacred masks, their sculptors are not publicly acknowledged.

and I eventually realized that my questions would not have been appropriate for a Baule person to ask. Though his sculptures might be visible, the artist's identity had no place in the important communication with wild spirits that occurs during a divination session. *Komyen* virtually never perform without accessories made by more than one artist: a decorated hat, carved wooden gong mallet (Fig. 2), and sometimes sculptures placed on display. Yet most diviners were emphatic: no one could ask the name of the artist who made their objects—not their clients, not their neighbors, and certainly not other *komyen*, their competitors. During a performance the main focus of attention is the diviner him- or herself, and the spirits that speak through their human partner. The sculptors are only some among many individuals who con-

tribute to the performance's aesthetic appeal, its drama, and the impact of the messages divulged there—the assistants and musicians who perform with the *komyen* being the most conspicuous.

In private, a client might bring a figure sculpture to a diviner to evaluate after the death of the relative who had owned it. The first question the diviner would ask is whether the object was known to be efficacious. The name of the maker would never come up, not even out of curiosity. What matters is the name of the spirit it was made to serve, and possibly the type of wood from which it was made.

When Baule artists' names are publicly mentioned, however, it is in discussions and recollections quite unrelated to the critical context in which such discussions occur in art history. The contexts in which artists are remembered reveal much about the role of the sculptor in Baule culture, and they go a long way toward explaining why the artist may be well known, even though the objects can be rightly described as "anonymous." In the Baule case, the author's identity is treated as a minor fact of no relevance to anyone but the person who commissioned the object or a person seeking to order a similar work. So, while the artist is often remembered as a man

who did certain remarkable things and went certain places, he is often "forgotten" in connection with specific objects. Among the Baule (again as elsewhere in Africa), the acquisition of sculpture is made directly from the artist face to face, without a middleman. He is thus more likely to be personally known to the purchaser of the art object in a Baule village than to a collector in contemporary Paris or New York who purchases from a gallery.

The first and most explicit discussion of a Baule artist's identity and his skills centers around the commissioning of sculptures, mainly spirit-spouse figures. If a recently acquired sculpture is impressive, people will ask where it was carved and by whom, questions that are appropriate only in relation to newly made objects. Adults explain that they want to know where a sculpture was made, and the name of the artist, in case they or someone they know needs to commission one in the future. Where the object was made is more important than the sculptor's personal name, because so many Baule people have the same names. It would be impossible to find an artist if one had only his name, whereas he could be found fairly easily if one could go to his village and inquire. This kind of dis-



cussion is utilitarian and contributes only minimally to an artist's fame.

The other context in which Baule men and women may discuss a given artist is as a conspicuous character in society. In the Baule world, people are the most interesting and most discussed thing, and artists certainly excite comment as personalities. They are talked about and remembered for their behavior, their idiosyncrasies, and their remarkable abilities, but not particularly for having made this or that specific work. Significantly, they are no more likely to be remembered than other members of the community who distinguish themselves one way or another. Their genealogies are known and discussed—as are the kinship relations of most people. As individuals, sculptors are of course known to everyone in their villages and sometimes over a much wider area. Baule people, like other peoples in Africa, do not prize or even emphasize individuality as a general social value. The artist is esteemed for what he can do rather than for the singular individual he is.

The artist's name is similarly dissociated from entertainment masks, even though they are surrounded by few interdictions, and do not embody spirits (Figs. 1, 3). The names of the performer and of the mask itself are likely to be mentioned by many spectators, but the name of the carver is irrelevant. Dancers who wear masks (Fig. 4) say that the most important aspect of their performance is the movement of the dance. (Alisa LaGamma [1998:22] reports a similar finding among the Punu of Gabon.) Kalou Yao of Kami, a great dancer, said that he had been born with this talent, and that since he was the best dancer, he should be given the best carved mask to wear. He remarked that the aesthetic quality of the wooden mask was finally secondary. In the case of the men's sacred masks, the *bo nun amuin* (Fig. 5), the artist is even less publicly acknowledged.

Women are not supposed to ask who carved a mask, not even if it is an entertainment portrait mask of a woman (Fig. 7); they are not supposed to know (or at least acknowledge knowing) anything at all about the subject—where a mask comes from, who makes or keeps it, or who wears it. This means that men should be careful about identifying mask

carvers in conversation for fear that women or children might overhear.

Public knowledge of the artist's identity may actually impinge upon the prestige, power, or success that is supposed to attach to the owner. The spiritual weight of the object, the locus of an immaterial presence, matters much more than the ordinary mortal who did the carving; the success of a mask performance may depend on its separation from the everyday or on a certain amount of mystification that would be compromised by a recognition of the prosaic facts of its making. Baule owners of traditional sculptures acquire them from distant carvers if

they can afford to, or from itinerant ones, perhaps because these artists can be most conveniently "overlooked" later. The practice of artists carving in solitude may serve a related purpose—among others—of distancing the finished object from the everyday. The fact that virtually all other creative artists—such as potters, casters, weavers, wall painters—as well as carvers for the tourist trade, routinely work in public among the Baule would tend to support this explanation.

Adje Loukou Gondouss, a Baule *komyen* with whom I discussed these issues in Lolobo in 1998, compared the artist to a parent, saying the sculptor was



Opposite page:

6. Portrait mask. Wood, 34cm (13.4"). Henau collection, Belgium.

This page:

7. Portrait mask of Moya Yanso, carved by Owie Kimou (active 1910–48). Wood, brass, paint; 35cm (13.8"). Collection of Philippe Ancart, Brussels.

Portrait masks are used in Mbilo dances. Although these dances are performed as entertainment, women and children are not supposed to know the names of the artists or the dancers.

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Above and opposite page: 8a, b. Heddle pulleys by Kouassi Koffi Joseph. On the basis of style they might well be mistakenly attributed to several artists. Yakouakoukro village, Warebo area, 1982. Photo: Susan Vogel.

Right: 9. The artist Kouassi Koffi Joseph with a figure he carved that failed to sell. Yakouakoukro village, Warebo area, 1982. Photo: Susan Vogel.

like the mother of the object. But when I probed, he changed the analogy, saying the sculptor was actually like a midwife who delivered the spirit into material form. Baule cosmology holds that the unborn already exist in the *blolo*, the other world, waiting to be born, so in Baule belief parents, like midwives, bring beings into this world without bringing them into existence. So too, the spirit preexists the creation of the sculpture (which is its temporary abode), and the spirit will survive its loss or destruction. Gold face pendants and beads in the *adja*, the Baule sacred family treasure, belong to the ancestors. If they were melted down and cast in other shapes, they would still harm anyone who tried to appropriate them, for the gold belongs to the ancestors, while the aesthetic form given it by an artist is incidental.

Kongo and Other Artists

More extreme than the Baule case is that of the Kongo: the sculptor's work is not even necessary. Wyatt MacGaffey writes: "The nkisi-object is thought of as a container for the nkisi-force. Often its 'body' (*nitu*) is a gourd, a bag, a bark box, a pot or a snail shell, but it may well be a wooden figure to which 'medicines' (*bilongo*)





have been added. Without the medicines the container is nothing:..." (1991:5). The Kongo example is an extreme because of the great variety of objects that can be interchanged with a carved figure, but it serves to underscore a widespread belief that the sacred work of art is usually just the container for a supernatural force that is far more important.

As the maker of the container for a preexisting spirit, or of an object which is the embodiment of meaning already known to all, the artist is probably not the absolute creator or originator we mean in the modern sense of "artist." Bogumil Jewsiewicki writes this about the artist in premercantile Central African societies:

The artists...may have given birth to forms, but those forms did not become the bearers of the artists' social identity. And the artist held no copyright over any form unless politically authorized to do so. A Kuba king, for example, could proclaim himself the author of any new form created by the artists of his court (Bope n.d. 12-13, Vansina 1978). The distinction between the material act of creation and the social title of creation is analogous to a social group's treatment of parenthood: the father is considered a parent only if—through an agreement such as marriage, adoption, or purchase—he has the right to engender the relationship that brings his offspring into a given group.
(Jewsiewicki 1991:135)

For the Kono of Sierra Leone, Kris Hardin reports a similar disjunction be-

tween the literal maker and the socially recognized author of a cloth. Even though women do no weaving, a Kono woman "will say that she wove the cloth, which means she hired the weaver, who then wove it for her. In addition, people tend to forget the name of the man who wove a particular cloth: it is much more likely that they will remember [the woman] who spun the thread, as this is usually the person who gives the cloth away as a gift (or alternatively still possesses it)" (Hardin 1996:36-37). Warren d'Azevedo writes: "When one admired the work of a singer, a musician or a woodcarver, one was usually informed of the name of the patron as though the identity of the actual producer was insignificant" (1973:332). And Simon Ottenberg observes, "Sometimes the client was considered the maker of the object, the artist only the mechanism of its production."¹¹ Daniel Biebuyck, half a continent away among the Lega of the Congo, had found the same selective memory: "It is most noteworthy that the living owners of the artworks, in tracing the history of successive owners of the object, then invariably wind up with the first owner of the piece, ignoring or simply not knowing its maker" (1976:141).

Yoruba Artists

Surprisingly, the Yoruba area provides the fullest evidence for the dissociation of the artist's reputation from particular objects, because it has the richest and deepest art historical research.¹² The paradox of known artists and anonymous works that I observed among the

Baule is mentioned repeatedly in *The Yoruba Artist* (Abiodun, Drewal & Pemberton 1994), which is the most extensive and thorough as well as the most recent book on artists in Africa. Rowland Abiodun frames the issue most clearly: "The problem of identifying individual artists among the Yoruba is still very much with us. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that many Yoruba artists do not sign their works in the way artists in other societies have" (Abiodun, Drewal & Pemberton 1994:41). John Picton describes his own extended field research on artists in the mid-1960s, following upon William Fagg's which had succeeded in locating and naming a dozen of the most important artists or workshops:

I was able to establish relative chronologies for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in regard to who was the father of whom, and who taught whom. Nevertheless, one of the most tantalizing aspects of research in Opin was the apparent impossibility of identifying the variety of individual hands with all the names of sculptors of the previous hundred or so years, except in a very few cases. To what could one attribute this apparent loss of memory?...I was shown many sculptures...but such was the inconsistency of attribution that, with the exception of Dada Owolabi [the present-day carver in Isare], names could not be put to hands with any certainty....The name Rotimi Baba Oloja was widely remembered throughout Opin, but like the sculptors [cited]...he too is an

10. Figure said to have been commissioned by the owner's great-grandfather in the Nzipri region, where a circle of artists may have been carving in a similar style at the same time. Agba Bounou region, 1978. Photo: Susan Vogel.

example of the memory of a sculptor surviving without reference to specific works.

(Picton 1994:8-10)

Most of the sculpture in question had been made within living memory, and some of the masters were still alive. In all likelihood, what Picton encountered was not an accidental loss of memory but the result of a deliberate choice—like the artists' choice not to mark or sign their works in some way.¹³ Cultures preserve the information that they value, and African traditions conserve copious and complex bodies of information about material things—such as the precise boundaries of their fields and forests. *Oriki*, Yoruba praise poems, memorialize great carvers' names and reputations, but they remember the artist as a man, without linking him to specific works. None seem to tie even the most famous artists to specific, material artworks, though a few mention towns in which a sculptor worked and cite general features or types of objects at which he excelled. Wande Abimbola writes:

I have attempted to demonstrate the knowledge that we can gain from oral literature in our study of the Yoruba tradition of wood carving. We may never be able to find a single wooden object that can be recognized as an authentic carving of Lagbaya [who is celebrated in *oriki*], but our knowledge of his work and the society in which he lived will certainly continue to enrich our understanding of Yoruba wood carving.

(Abimbola 1994:142)

Identifying Artists: Methodologies

I would like to describe three familiar examples of Baule workshops or individual hands, each identified by different means: 1) an artist *and* a substantial body of his work encountered in person and recorded (this is the only means completely free from conjecture); 2) a single object recorded in the field, with some information about the artist to whom other works can be attributed on the basis of style; 3) a group of closely similar objects assigned to an artist or workshop purely on stylistic grounds, with a name of convenience attached to this hypothetical artist. A fourth method is presented here for the first time: a series of objects are securely assigned to



a single hand and time period by examination under magnification of what I call the *adz* signature.

Kouassi Koffi Joseph

The first and most certain method confirms the identification of an artist and his oeuvre absolutely, but I have found that it also suggests deep flaws in all the other methods of attribution we rely upon. I met the sculptor Kouassi Koffi Joseph in Yakouakoukro village in the Warebo area in 1982. He showed me a

dozen pulleys (Figs. 8a, b) carved in anticipation of clients (as was often the case for such personal, decorative objects) and a figure he had made some years earlier and never sold (Fig. 9). His body of work represented a remarkably wide range of types and even styles—something I had found before when examining the objects a sculptor showed me in the field. Comparing the eyes carved by Kouassi Koffi Joseph, for example, one can find crisply faceted ones and soft, ill-defined ones, as well as an example delineating open upper and lower lids.



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11. Lid of an ointment jar (detail). Wood, 23cm (9.1"). Collection of William W. Brill.

This container for shea butter is one of many works from an unnamed workshop located around Dimbokro during the first half of the twentieth century.

All his pulleys had a generic similarity when they were photographed, but I am sure that if one encountered them today, scattered in a dozen collections and displaying disparate patinas of time and use, it would be impossible to assert that all were by a single hand, much less to connect the figure to any of them. The pulley with a horned head on the extreme right in Figure 8a might even have been mistakenly attributed to a Guro artist. A figure that is closely similar to the one Kouassi Koffi Joseph showed me can be attributed to him

with relative confidence. That works by an artist look similar when grouped together but are hard to connect when scattered sounds a loud warning. It is certain that many artists' works are too varied in style to ever be correctly attributed using only stylistic similarity, the principal tool of historians of African art.

The Nzipri Circle of Artists

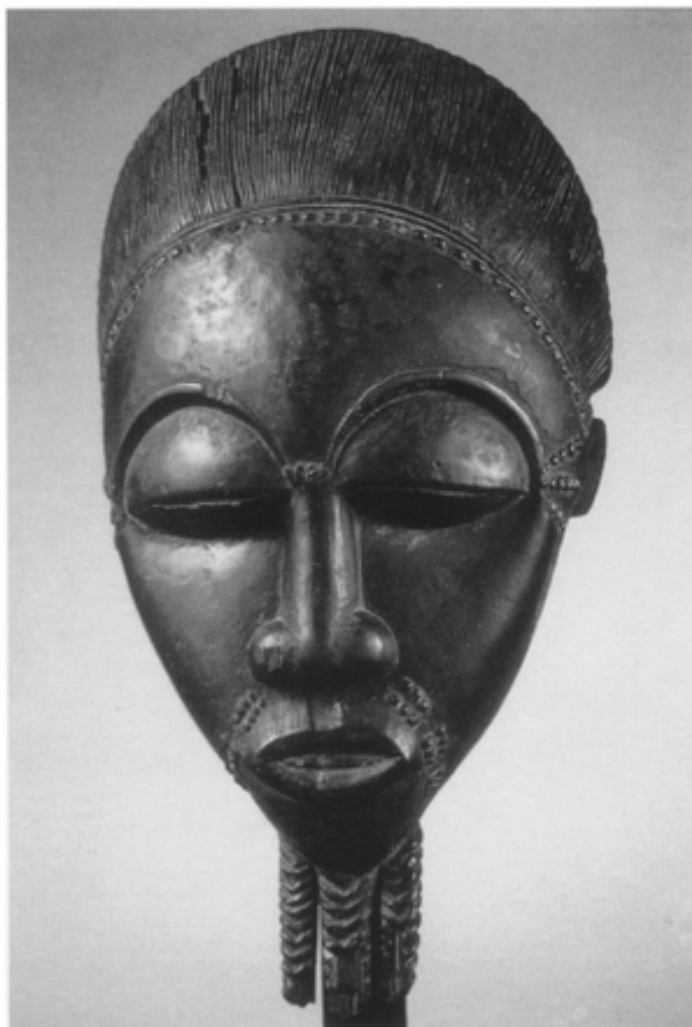
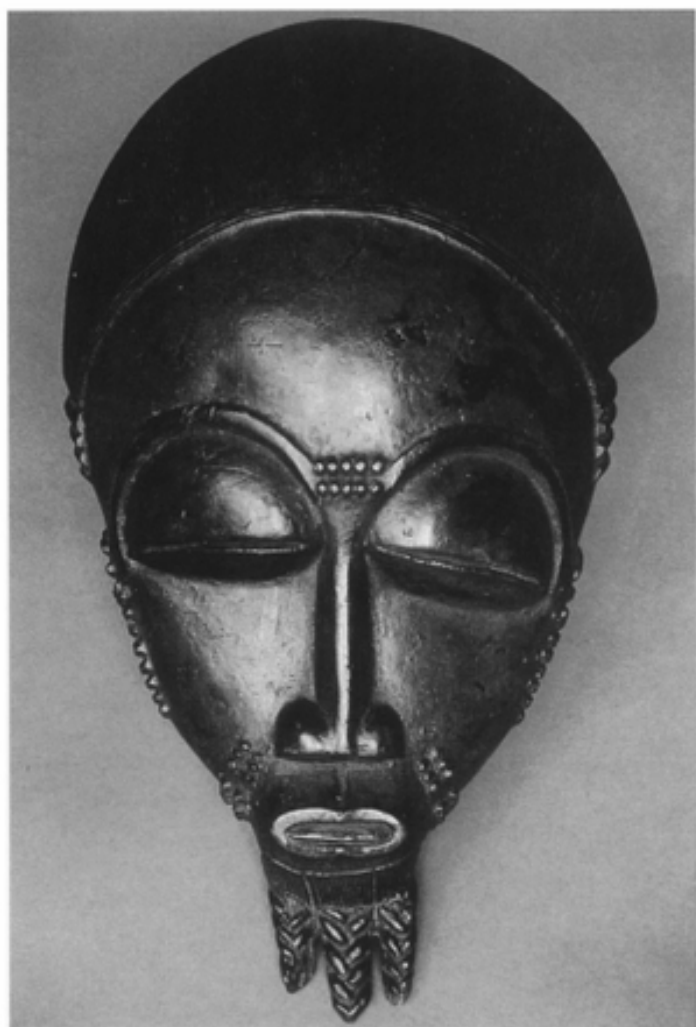
The second means of identification is exemplified by a single old figure I was shown in a village I scarcely knew (Fig. 10). The owner remembered the name of the original owner, his great-grandfather, and that he had commissioned the piece in the Nzipri Baule region (between Didievi and Tiebissou). He brought it home to the Agba Bonou region proba-

bly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The owner knew nothing else about the fine female figure, though he doubted that it was for a *komyen* trance diviner.

I suspect there was what I shall call an Nzipri Circle of artists carving in the central Baule area during the late nineteenth century. They produced a small but distinguished group of figure sculptures; among the more prominent are the superb pair of figures in the Metropolitan Museum and the bearded male figure exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1935.¹⁴ This corpus seems too varied and too numerous to assert that they are all from a single hand (despite the provocative example of Kouassi Koffi Joseph), and since none of the examples show characteristics of twentieth-century Baule art, I conjecture that they are the work of a single generation of colleagues who influenced each other, rather than by successive generations of master and followers. The style of the Nzipri Circle of artists is characterized by a long, supple line, the body having a soft, rounded belly, the face concave and heart-shaped with large round eyes, and the asymmetrical coiffure often showing unusual, large, raised ornaments. The idiosyncratic treatment of the lower leg is an easily recognized trait: the ankle is usually behind the center of gravity, well behind the knee, and the ankles are small, pulled close together, giving the figure tension and a sort of lift off the high, tight, deeply ribbed base.

An Unnamed Corpus

The third corpus, built solely on stylistic grounds, includes scores upon scores of figure sculptures made probably by a number of hands over a long period of time in a workshop whose location is still unknown to me. I have never found a sculpture that could be documented in the field, or in a museum,¹⁵ and I can only suspect that this workshop was in the Agba area somewhere near Dimbokro. The workshop apparently specialized in figures and seems also to have made ointment jars surmounted by heads (Fig. 11). It was extremely prolific and most active after 1920, continuing through the mid-twentieth century. The earliest example I know is an unpublished male figure in the Musée de l'Homme, Paris; the records are muddled, but it probably entered the collection in the early 1930s. This workshop style is marked by a long, round-chinned face with round eyes, a full stomach grasped by hands with long fingers curling below the navel, and a high, squared-off plinth that is usually textured. The leg is often treated as a bulging form constricted all around the knee. A diagnostic of this workshop is often a clearly marked groove across the biceps which may resemble the edge of a sleeve. These



COURTESY OF THE GUGENHEIM MUSEUM, NEW YORK

works exhibit a wide range of competence and refinement, seemingly because a number of hands worked together in a given place over a long time.

The Totokro Master

Of greater significance artistically and art historically than those above is the oeuvre of a single great master whom I have come to know as the Totokro Master. His oeuvre was recognizable initially on stylistic grounds, but working with it led to my discovery of an unmistakable "adz signature" on his sculptures. The objects by the Totokro Master that were first known to me resembled the canonical bearded portrait mask that was for many years in the Charles Rattton collection, Paris (Fig. 12). In the 1970s Jerry Vogel and I acquired a similar bearded mask on the market in Abidjan (Fig. 13); a third was in the Franco Monte collection, Milan, in the 1970s (Fig. 14). A fourth example was a female, perhaps the mate to the Rattton mask; it was published in Budapest in 1911 and subsequently disappeared (Fig. 15). In addition to their obvious similarity, the first two revealed a singular particularity that made it like-

ly they were by the same hand. The artist had carved a depression behind each eye and then cut through to form the slits for visibility (an unusual technique). On both of these masks, he had made the same mistake of miscalculating the height of the eyeholes, piercing through too high and making a small hole in the big eyelid before correctly locating the slits where the upper and lower lids join.

As for dating, Rattton told me (1970) that his mask had arrived in Paris before the First World War; it had layers of wax consistent with a long stay in a European collection of the time. The other two had left Africa half a century later, and both showed more damage and wear. In Abidjan I had been shown a page with notes about the second mask that were said to have been transcribed by the schoolteacher of the village from which it came. According to the notes, the mask came from Totokro village in the Agba area; the personal name of the mask was given as Bela, but no artist's name was mentioned. Totokro is one of a group of three Agba villages (with Boreakpokro and Boreahoussoukro) near Dimbokro that are known for the large numbers of sculptors who have worked there for sev-

Left: 12. Bearded portrait mask by the Totokro Master. Wood, 32.4cm (12.8"). Formerly collection of Charles Rattton, Paris; present collection unknown.

Although there are only six masks in this style, this one is generally considered an icon of Baule art. In a personal communication (fall 1970), Mr. Rattton told me it had been in the large Hesses collection which he purchased between the World Wars. Hesses had acquired it before 1914, but it shows little sign of wear. Of the series of similar bearded masks (see also Figs. 13-16), this displays the greatest asymmetry of the eyes and hair. It is the most successful in composition (and probably was among the last in the group to be carved).

Right: 13. Bearded portrait mask by the Totokro Master. Wood, 30.8cm (12.1"). Private collection. This mask, acquired in Abidjan in the 1970s, shows signs of extended use. It has the most balanced composition and may have been among the early efforts of the series. Anecdotal information connects it with Totokro village in the Agba area.

eral generations. In 1993 I encountered a later, but related, bearded portrait mask in Boreakpokro by an artist whose name had been forgotten (Vogel 1998:140).

While I was working on Baule collections in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris,



Left: 14. Bearded portrait mask by the Totokro Master. Wood, tacks, 30.5cm (12"). Formerly collection of Franco Monte, Milan; present collection unknown. From Abbate 1972:50.

This mask showed signs of extended use when it was acquired in Bouaké in 1960. It would appear to be an early experiment in asymmetrical elements, but the artist has balanced his composition with the opposed directions of beard and hair. His other masks do not return to this compromise.

Right: 15. Female portrait mask by the Totokro Master. From *Keleti Kiállítás a Művészházban* ("Oriental Exhibition at the House of Artists"), 1911. Present collection unknown.

This sculpture was published in Budapest in 1911 and has not been recorded since. The photograph suggests wear. The mask is particularly beautiful and close to the Ratton example in Figure 12—they may have formed a pair.

an inquiry with photographs of five objects labeled "Senufo?" arrived in the mail from the municipal museum in Agen. A donation perhaps from the 1930s (the records were lost) included a pair of masks by the artist I thought of as the Totokro Master (Fig. 16), a pair of figures that could easily be by the same hand (Fig. 17), and a monkey figure that was



hard to place (Fig. 18). I traveled to Agen and examined the five pieces: all had been newly made when they were collected, and had been blackened by an identical formula.

The Adz Signature, a New Research Tool

Searching for evidence that all were by the same artist, I first discovered that under magnification they all showed traces of the same red fibers embedded in the surface—not useful for my purposes, since the red lint could have come from packing materials or other sources. Finally I realized that the entire group had to have been carved by the same tool: adz strokes in the unsmoothed areas (the backs of the masks, the undersides of the figures' bases) were still fresh and clearly visible, and on every piece they showed evidence of a distinctive, certainly unique damage to the cutting edge of the blade that had shaped them.

Baule adzes and other traditional tools have locally made iron blades that today are sharpened with a steel file, but formerly were sharpened on a stone. Wielded in the courtyard or in the forest,

they may be used to strike various things, and more often than not the cutting edge becomes nicked and damaged by blows. The deepest of these are not effaced by sharpening—at least for a period of time—so that each blade has a unique profile, like a key. This unique profile will mark every cut made by a given blade for a limited period until sharpening, rusting, or fresh damages alter it. And because the distinctive profile changes as time goes on, we can locate objects together not only in space, but in time. Objects that can be found to have identical adz profiles must inevitably have been made with the same tool, very probably by the same hand. (Assistants and others nearby could theoretically use the same tool, but artists working together tend not to share tools). At the very least, two objects marked with identical adz profiles must have been carved in the same workshop or workspace, and within a relatively short time.

The fact that the Agen objects were newly made when they were collected established that the Totokro Master was alive and working after the arrival of the French. Such a varied group of objects—



almost a sampler of major Baule sculpture types—is quite unusual and is likely to have been acquired on order from the artist. Totokro is near the colonial administrative center of Dimbokro, which had a growing French presence once the railroad to Bouaké was completed in 1912, and a very small one before that time. Circumstantial evidence, then, suggested that the Totokro Master was active in the lower Agba area at least

Counterclockwise from top left:

16. Pair of masks by the Totokro Master. Musée Municipal, Agen. Photo: Susan Vogel, 1982.

17. Pair of figures by the Totokro Master. They were newly carved when collected. Musée Municipal, Agen. Photo: Susan Vogel, 1982.

18. Monkey figure by the Totokro Master. The attribution to this artist could not have been made on the basis of style alone. The distinctive adz signature provided confirming evidence. Musée Municipal, Agen. Photo: Susan Vogel, 1982.



through the second and third decades of this century. (A male figure by this artist entered the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1931.) Research in Totokro confirmed its reputation as the home of many sculptors over several generations, but I could find no one there who could connect any individual name to these works.

Among a number of sculptures I was shown in Boreahoussoukro, the village next to Totokro, was a female figure surely by this hand (Fig. 19). In 1994 it belonged to an old man who had inherited it from his father. He described its meaning and told me that the artist had been an Agba Baule, but he did not know the artist's personal name or his village. We calculated that this figure had been carved around 1920. I was delighted to be able to make a connection between field information and collection objects, but this was a serendipitous finding: it was only the third time in many years of art research that I have ever encountered in a Baule village an object by a hand I recognized.

The Search for Artists

There can be no doubt that the artist is central to the study of art history, and that African art history is no exception in this regard. It is crucial to record artists' biographies, their methods of production, what they have to say about their work, and especially to build inventories of their art. It is clear, however, that to accomplish this we will have to rely heavily on collection data in museum files and on diagnostic methods such as close examination for an adz signature. The reliance upon sources other than field data is necessary in part because few African cultures have been as interested in these questions as Western scholars.

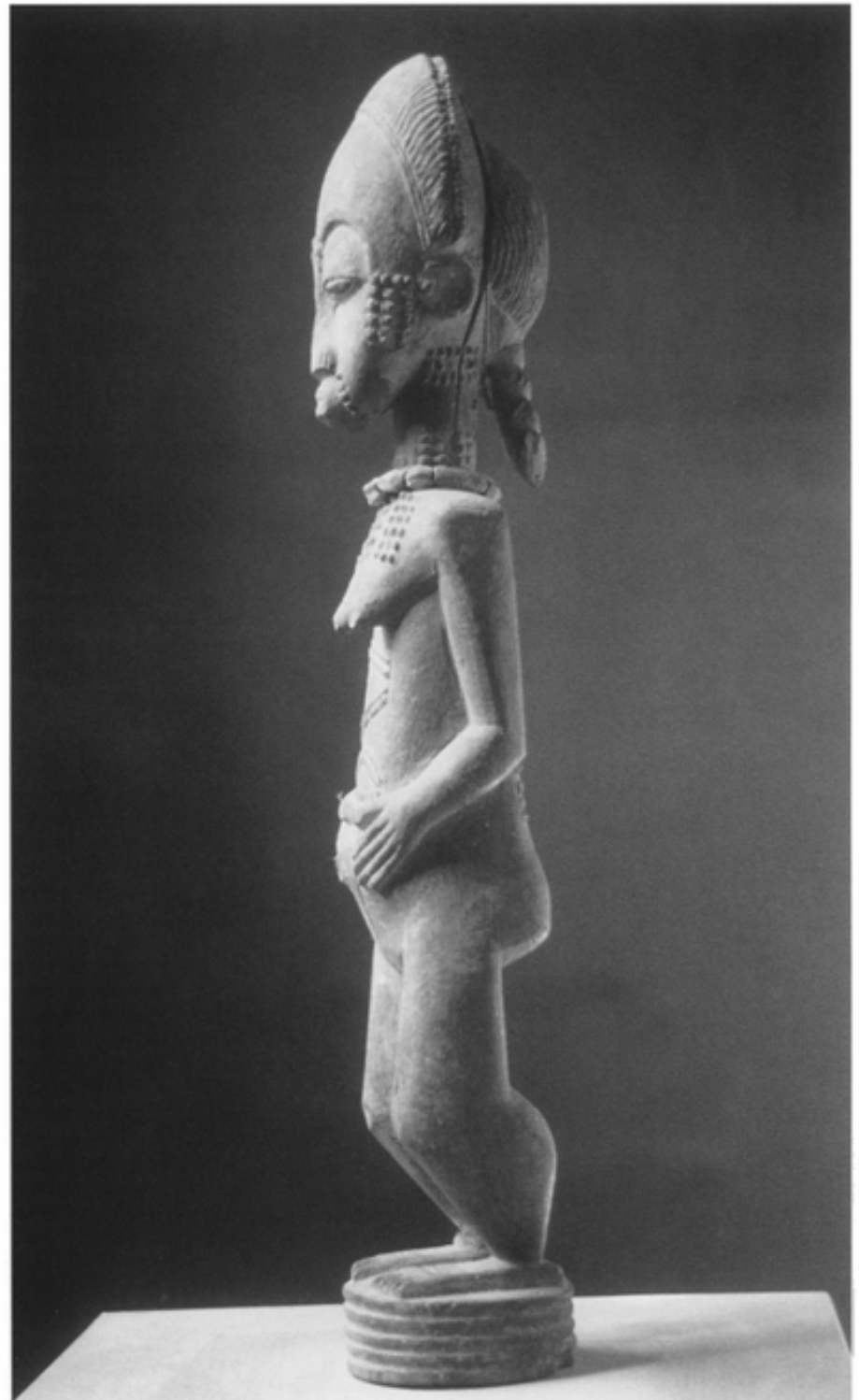
From the field we know of a small number of twentieth-century African artists' names and life histories, and we have a small number of works attributed to named artists. Like other researchers in the field, I accumulated enough information to build a small corpus of works I could attribute to a dozen otherwise unnamed artists. Only later did I realize that this interest of mine was not shared by the Baule people I knew who were involved with art. If I had been collecting the names and histories of previous generations of individuals who were especially accomplished farmers, orators, or healers, I believe I would have found at least as much information preserved. As a research tool, I have taken photographs of Baule objects from museums and collections into the field, seeking attribu-

tions and other information. Like John Picton, I have never been able to establish a consensus on the local origin of a single sculpture, much less a more precise attribution to an individual with a name.

From collections, scholars can group works into the hands of masters and their circles, linking these works when possible to names known from fieldwork. Because so little information is obtainable in the field, it is clear that

these corpora can only be enlarged with data primarily from museum collections, scientific analysis, and other methodologies. Perhaps my accidental discovery of the distinctiveness of adz marks may lead to other confirmed attributions. This evidence, at least, is very persuasive of authorship—not only for Baule but for all African artists—for it is as close to the artist's hand as we will ever get. □

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19. Female figure by the Totokro Master. Wood, 33cm (13"). Private collection. Recorded in Boreahoussoukro village, near Totokro, in 1994. Photo: Susan Vogel.

Makomba, with the understanding that the facepiece would be returned to him at the end of the camp.

9. For example, Chief Kende, inaugurated into office in 1979, rebuilt his house and replaced the associated statuary in 1988; Chief Nzambi was inaugurated in 1980 and replaced his house in 1988. Chief Kinsamba is unusually punctilious. Invested in 1960, he claims to have built his seventh *nkuba* in 1987. (He is also known to exaggerate.) His last was abandoned owing to accusations of sorcery. He alone of any chief had lintel and door panels mounted in 1988 (Strother 1993: figs. 3, 21), although Nestor Seeuwus photographed many *in situ* in 1974 for the Institut des Musées Nationaux in Kinshasa.

10. This was the pattern in the 1980s, and some historical depth is suggested for the practice through the photographs of Frank J. Enns, 1920s-40s; Erma Berkeley, 1920s-30s; and L. de Soubserghie, 1950s.

11. The Pende have a long history of traveling considerable distances to place commissions for masks. Among the Eastern Pende in the twentieth century, the Bakova Nzamba (north-central) are reputed to have the best sculptors and often receive commissions from chiefs in the east and south. Among Pende west of the Loange at the turn of the century, the best sculptors were reputed to be found in the Lake Matshi area, but this preference switched to the heartland of the Central Pende in the 1920s.

Because of the weight of the objects, sculptors of rooftop statuettes had to do their work on site. Eastern Pende Chief Kashij (Ndongo) recounts that his father, Kahembe, traveled a good deal to clients ranging from the nearby Chief Kotshi to Chief Samba in the Bandundu province.

12. Gabama's heirs (nephews) confirm that he sold pieces to foreigners, as does Maquet-Tombu (1953:17). Moreover, I've talked to masqueraders who regret having sold their Gabama headpieces when they could not resist the price or when the works cracked and were no longer serviceable to dance.

The Institut des Musées Nationaux du Zaïre in Kinshasa owned a number of masks identified as Gabama's in 1989 (e.g., 71.1.41, 71.1.42, 71.1.64). Collected on December 12, 1970, by P. Timmermans in Munzomba, the masks date after the sculptor's death and the devastating Mulele Rebellion. It is likely that the men selling the masks were using Gabama's name as a reference to the atelier at Nyoka-Munene. The practice of using the senior artist's name for the work of an entire atelier accounts for the unlikely attribution of a peculiar mask to Gabama (as "Kabsama sha Mupese") by a source of de Soubserghie's (1959:51, n. 1, fig. 90). In the citation, Gabama's name is merged with "Sha Mupesa," an alternative name for his nephew, Gishola Shimuna. The latter is a more likely attribution, as the work shows some of the fantasy for which Gishola is known.

13. The scarifiers depicted on the facepieces of masks only vaguely approximate the actual scarification once practiced by Pende men and women. Because of the distance between masquerader and audience, fine naturalistic forms would be illegible. Sculptors have great discretion in creating styles that enhance the reading of physiognomy at a distance.

14. My translation: "Kano yua yuta gwana ihala gwa galandaga ari ga' enji gwabwa nambo nanga pila y' enji idi mullaga gwabwaga gijwa nita y' mullera."

15. Although field associates hesitate about whether it was Gabama or his "nephew" Gishola Shimuna who invented the first *lunda* facepiece, the evidence from historical photos indicates a date too early for the career of Gishola. For example, a photo showing an early *lunda* facepiece with tubular eyes, taken by Joyce or Donald Doyle (Brett-Smith 1983: fig. 17), was probably made 1919-23. Another photo taken the same day was published by Norden in 1924. Other Central Pende sculptors quickly adopted the form with tubular eyes that was Gabama's innovation.

16. The literature persistently confuses the decorative pendants made of ivory (or sometimes metal) with the "amulets" used in healing rituals. The latter were made by specialists or members of the patient's family from wood or nuts, and their form could be rudimentary.

17. Jeanne Maquet-Tombu noted the pattern of older sculptors mixing wood and ivory in their trade by comparing Gabama to another old sculptor at Musanga Lubue (1953:16).

18. H. J. Koloss reports that Frobenius sold the Berlin museum 728 objects in 1904 to finance his first expedition to Africa. Many of the works in the collection passed through the Hamburg dealer J. F. G. Unlauff (1990:21-22).

19. Hilton-Simpson, who traveled with Torday, echoes a similar sentiment. He reports that it was nearly impossible to procure voluntary porters for their expedition equipment among the Bushongo, because the men preferred to weave cloth to earn "money" (1956:113).

20. Nonetheless, I cannot agree with anthropologist Delores Richter that the "opportunity to carve full-time... has generally allowed carvers to become more adept in their craft" (1980:71-72). The commodification of amulets has resulted in deforestation and increased pressure to cut corners in materials and time-consuming techniques. To give one example, sculptors are increasingly replacing incised decorations on headpieces with painted versions.

21. It is at this point that the Pende evidence diverges from the argument that Mary Nooter Roberts made in the last issue (1998) about the market value of assigning names in Luba art history, where there is a corpus of works presumed to be safely precolonial in age.

22. Anthropologists J. I. Guyer and S. M. Eno Belinga have argued that "[e]nlightenment thinking about individuality and change emphasized the modern rupture from the collective embeddedness of identity in traditional societies" (1995:104).

As a consequence, concepts of "personal realization" and cultural values of "social multiplicity" have been seriously misrepresented in studies of Equatorial African societies (pp. 104-5).

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SDMS: Notes, from page 39

1. Arturo Lindsay, "Orishas: Living Gods in Contemporary Latino Art," in *Sisterhood Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*, ed. Arturo Lindsay. Washington, D.C., and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.
2. Arturo Lindsay is as well known a scholar as he is an installation and performance artist. He is Associate Professor of Art and Art History at Spelman College in Atlanta. In addition to his study of the Congos of Porto-Belo, he runs a summer program for Spelman students to live and make art with the local inhabitants. He is also in the process of establishing a center where he can bring together the traditions of the village with related ones from the United States, Latin America, Europe, and Africa. Lindsay developed and coordinated the first African Diaspora Program at the National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C.
3. Lindsay has had solo exhibitions at the Nexus Contemporary Art Center in Atlanta, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Panama City, and Franklin Furnace in New York City, and has participated in group exhibitions at the Palazzo del Esposizioni in Rome and El Museo del Barrio in New York. In 1997 he was included in "In Search of Balance: The Artist Scholar" at the Center for African American Culture, Smithsonian Institution. He organized "Ceremony of Spirit: Nature and Memory in Contemporary Latino Art" for the Mexican Museum, San Francisco.
4. José Bedía was born in Havana, where he studied at the Superior Institute of Art and the School of Art of San Alejandro. He was a prizewinner at the second Havana Biennial in 1986, and in 1994 was awarded a Guggenheim Memorial Foundation International Fellowship. That same year he had a retrospective exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and was also invited to do an installation at the São Paulo Biennial. In 1997 Bedía had a retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Monterrey, Mexico. Among his group exhibitions are "Caribbean Visions: Contemporary Painting and Sculpture," which traveled throughout the United States in 1995-97; "Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas" (Museum for African Art, New York, toured 1993-94); the 1990 Venice Biennale, and "Art of the Fantastic: Latin American Art, 1920-1987" (Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1987).
5. Manuel Vega has been Artist in Residence for the Guggenheim Museum's "Learning Through Art" program since 1993. He has also served as Artist in Residence at El Museo del Barrio and as set and costume designer for the Dance Brazil! Company. Vega has had extensive experience in art education, and has exhibited at the Bronx Museum, the Caribbean Cultural Center, El Museo del Barrio, Kerkela House, and the Hood Museum at Dartmouth College. In 1998 his work was included in "Beads, Body, and Soul: Art and Light in the Yoruba Universe" (UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History). Vega was also featured in the program *New York—the Secret African City* by Robert Farris Thompson. Most recently he executed a mural for the Broadway production *The Coleridge* by Paul Simon.

VOGEL: Notes, from page 55

- This paper takes up issues originally intended for a chapter on the Basile artist in *Basile: African Art/Western Eyes* (Vogel 1997), the book accompanying the exhibition currently on view at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.
1. The artists discussed here are those visual artists, mainly sculptors, working in local traditions roughly before the middle of the twentieth century, when changing attitudes toward individualism began to make a difference. In general the issue of anonymity differs for weavers and potters and for many performing artists. African artists working in international media and styles have signed their works and asserted their individuality since the dawn of the twentieth century. In Nigeria, for example, Aina Onabolu was a full-time easel painter by 1906.
 2. Frans Oubrecht and William Fagg were among the first Africanists to work this way.
 3. As Mary Nooter Roberts's paper "The Naming Game: Ideologies of Luba Artistic Identity" suggests (1998:61-62), assigned names in African art have become issues of contention rather than tools of convenience. Perhaps the use of neutral numbers or letters would advance the discipline of African art history more effectively.
 4. See Smith 1961; Museum of Primitive Art 1963; Biebuyck 1969; Jopling 1971; d'Azavedo 1973.
 5. Among recent anthologies, we find much emphasis on the individual artist: Robin Poyner's 1995 survey does not have an index listing for artist; the section "The Artist" in Judith Perani and Fred T. Smith's comprehensive 1998 survey is only three paragraphs long, and places him right behind a somewhat longer section on "Art Patrons."
 6. The history recounted here refers primarily to African art in large, well-established, white institutions. The history in African American institutions is quite different. Though the story of Osoarec and Native American art in many cases was the same, there were nonetheless enough dissimilarities to make the inclusion of the others awkward in this brief sketch. I refer only to the United States, for it was quite another situation in Europe. For a brilliant analysis of this history see MacGaffey 1998.
 7. Anthropology departments and natural history museums had been dealing with African objects all along, of course, and less conservative art museums and art history departments in universities in a sense blazed the path. But the power to legitimize African art as art most broadly lay with the large, old, conserva-

five institutions. During the 1950s Columbia University's art history department began its uninterrupted teaching of African art; Nelson Rockefeller, one of the nation's most visible and respected collectors, opened his Museum of Primitive Art. In 1968 the museum's collections were exhibited and transferred to the Metropolitan Museum, whose director, Thomas Hoving, announced that the acquisition completed the last chapter of the great encyclopedia of world art that was the Metropolitan. Many remained skeptical. Other leading art institutions, however—the National Gallery of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, Yale's Art Gallery, and its art history department—integrated African art into their programs in sustained and substantial ways, and UCLA began to support the publication of this journal, *African Arts*, the first on the subject.

8. It is discouraging to note that this same debate was heard loudly again in the general press in New York as well as in London during the recent exhibition "Africa: The Art of a Continent," organized by the Royal Academy of Arts and the Guggenheim Museum.

9. For a record of this exhibition see Vogel 1980. The exhibition included three objects by the Bali Master and half a dozen objects by other named artists which were compared with related sculptures by unknown artists.

10. In the last decade, for example, the Smithsonian, Harvard University, and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts have made major commitments.

11. Personal communication, August 1990.

12. Some of the earliest field studies on sub-Saharan artists were conducted there. The most detailed information about traditional master carvers was gleaned early (1940s–50s) by Kenneth Murray, Kevin Carroll, William Fagg, and John Picton (beginning in 1961) in inquiries specifically about artists at a time when information was relatively plentiful—many Yoruba masters were still living or only recently deceased. In the nearly half century since that time, several generations of scholars of many different persuasions have also worked on Yoruba artists, so that today we benefit from over a half century of sustained and cumulative work on Yoruba woodcarvers.

13. At least one sculptor of *ibei* twin figures marked the bottoms of at least some of his pieces with an incised triangle, but we can only guess at his intentions. Roslyn Walker convincingly disputes the idea put forth by Fagg that the "salitre within an rectangle" was a virtual signature of Olowe of Ise (in Abiodun, Drewal & Pemberton 1994:103).

14. See the couple in Vogel 1998:236; the male figure in Sweeney 1935: fig. 69. Interestingly, a number of figures in this style have come out of Ivory Coast in the 1990s, and fakes have also appeared.

15. See Vogel 1981:74–75 for a discussion of this corpus. A male figure in this style is in the Musée de l'Homme collection, but it appears to have lost its documentation. The catalogue information and number it currently bears (0029.1) are those of a female figure collected by Delafosse in 1900. The male figure probably entered the collection in the 1930s. See Vogel 1997:250 for this history.

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1. As of October 1998, the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Photography owned three portrait photographs by Keita, all 1997 prints of portraits made in the 1950s. The Metropolitan Museum of Art owns four: three reside in the Photograph Study Collection, Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas; the fourth is held by the Department of Photographs.

2. Keita does not know the year of his birth; it is variously cited as 1923 (Magnin 1995:91; Cissé 1995; Bell et al. 1996:268) and 1921 (Magnin 1997:5; Loke 1997). One notes other discrepancies regarding dates. For example, the studio was established in 1948 according to both Keita and his uncle (Magnin 1997:9, 17), but in 1949 according to Cissé and Zaya (in Bell 1996:268). I have chosen to follow the dates provided by Keita in a 1995–96 interview with André Magnin, as it provides greater detail. I must acknowledge the monograph in which it is published (Magnin 1997) as a valuable source of information.

3. I have not yet had the opportunity to interview Keita's subjects about their authorial roles, and Keita's retirement precludes my observation of their activities in his studio. My discussion is based on the photographer's own accounts and the images themselves.

4. Although the re-authoring process primarily involved exhibitions and publications of the 1990s, it has come to include new multimedia outlets of pop-cultural commerce. In October 1998, for example, a modest search of the World Wide Web yielded 67 matches for Seydou Keita. Scores of his photographs can be viewed on the Internet. Keita's work is also accessible as a CD-ROM that includes 300 images and commentaries by the photographer himself, Dominique Angino, André Magnin, and others (Angino 1998).

5. This is not to say that a poststructuralist such as Barthes cannot be guilty of essentializing authorship. He proposes the following as a reductive foil to the modern, Western model of the autonomous author: "In ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman, or relator whose 'performance'—the mastery of the narrative code—may possibly be admired but never his genius" (1967:142).

6. This liberatory aspect of Barthes's and Foucault's critiques of authorship resonated with the contemporary Western art of their time, especially conceptual art. Sean Burke (1998) provides a useful analysis of Barthes's and Foucault's texts and a survey of their many critics.

7. See considerations of the collaborative aspect of Keita's work by Okwui Enwezor and Octavio Zaya (in Bell et al. 1996:33) and Kobena Mercer (1995), as well as Susan Vogel's discussion of it as a shared quality of African portrait photography (1991:116).

8. Keita dates his work according to his fabric backdrops. In 1949–52 he used a fringed backdrop, in 1952–55 a backdrop with a small floral print; in 1956 a backdrop with a bold leaf pattern; in 1957–1960 a backdrop with an arabesque pattern; and in 1960–64 a solid gray background (Magnin 1997:12; Geary 1996; Cissé 1995). The dates of some portraits (e.g., Fig. 4) do not correspond to those provided for the backdrops.

9. Compare a 1994 Keita interview (Magnin 1995:91) and 1995–96 interviews with Keita and his uncle (Magnin 1997:9, 16). Youssouf Cissé (1995) and Octavio Zaya (in Bell et al. 1996:268) date this event to 1945. See also note 2.

10. The photographer lists his portrait fees during the 1950s as follows: each session resulted in a minimum of three prints, priced according to size (6 cm x 9 cm, 25 francs; 9 cm x 12 cm, 100 francs; 13 cm x 18 cm, 150 francs); naturally lit sessions (which Keita preferred) were cheaper than those using arti-

cial lighting (300 vs. 400 francs) (Magnin 1997:10–11). The most inexpensive commission, then, would have cost 375 francs. The CFA franc, the currency of the former French West African states, was used in Mali until 1962. In 1954 a loaf of bread cost 50 CFA francs; a pack of cigarettes, 25 francs (Imperato 1982:300).

11. Keita identifies his prime competitors as Youssouf Cissé, Moustapha Traoré (also of Bamako-Koura), Mountaga Traoré (in Medina-Koura), and Abderramane Sakaly (in Medina-Koura). Malick Sidibé, also the subject of exhibitions in France and a monograph (Magnin 1998), was of a younger generation, and better known for photographs of club life than for portraits. See statements about Keita's competitors by the photographer and his uncle (Magnin 1997:10, 17), and an essay on Sakaly in Tobias Wendl and Heike Behrend's study of African studio photography (1998).

12. Keita worked consistently in black-and-white; he has said that he prefers it to color film both on aesthetic grounds and given its greater resistance to discoloration (Magnin 1995:13). The only exceptions I have seen were commissioned by *Harper's Bazaar* for their May 1998 issue (see later discussion in this article). The increased popularity of color photography, particularly since the 1980s, has required many African studio photographers to cede a significant chunk of their profits to external labs that develop their prints; this issue is incisively addressed in Wendl and du Plessis' film on Ghanaian practitioners (1998) and in Warner's study of Ivorian studio photographers (1998).

13. Probably the Musée National, although Keita does not name it.

14. In that issue of *Revue Noire* (no. 3, 1991, no. 31), the Center for African Art is credited as the photographer's source. *Revue Noire* has played a large role in the interpretation of African photography in France through its journal coverage, exhibitions it has organized, such as a 1992 survey of Senegalese portrait photographers, and associated publications such as the series *Éditions Revue Noire-Collection Seuil* and *Anthologie de la Photographie Africaine et de la Océan Indien* (1998).

15. The exhibitions of which I am thus far aware all postdate "Africa Explores" (see notes 17, 20). None have been identified by other scholars.

16. Magnin continues to act as liaison between the photographer and galleries wishing to sell or exhibit his work. See Magnin's catalogue of Pigozzi's contemporary African painting and sculpture collection (1991) and John Picton's commentary on the CAAC (1993); see also Dagmar Sina's interview with Magnin, who discusses his role as its curator (1993).

17. Keita's exhibitions in France include one curated by Magnin and Hervé Chandès for the Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain in Paris in 1994. His work was previously exhibited in France in 1993, in conjunction with two photography festivals: the third *Rencontres Photographiques* in Rouen and the *Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie* in Arles.

18. Magnin's presence as questioner is removed from these interviews (Magnin 1995, 1997), so Keita's statements read as a continuous narrative. This elision might be contrasted to the approach taken by Johannes Fabian in his published

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