

# **Africa Art Cart**

October 2013

**Department of Interpretation and Participatory Experiences  
Minneapolis Institute of Arts  
2400 Third Avenue South  
Minneapolis, Minnesota  
55404**

# African Art Cart Inventory

## Art Cart Interpreters:

The lead guide for each Art Cart shift should inventory the contents of the cart before **and** after the shift. If this is not done and objects are missing or damaged, the lead guide may be held responsible. (The lead guide is the first guide listed on the tour confirmation form.)

If an object is missing or damaged, make a notation on the inventory and report it to the Tour Office.

If an object is suddenly missing during your shift, notify security immediately by alerting the guard in the gallery or by calling x3225.

## INVENTORY: AFRICAN ART CART

Objects	Comments			
	In	Beginning of Shift	In	End of Shift
Kuba Cut-Pile Cloth (1)				
Kuba Applique Panel (1)				
Mudcloth (1)				
Goldweights (3), Scale, Shells, and Coins				
Shekere (1)(replaced)				
Ankle & Handheld Rattles (6 parts total)(additional)				
Thumb Piano (1)				
Kwere Staff (1)				
Asante Kente Cloth (1)				
Headrests (2) and Mat (1)				
Tutsi Baskets (2)				
Red and Black Heishi Necklaces (3)				
Xhosa Love Letter Necklace (1)				
Talking Drum and Mallet (2 parts)				
Gourd Flask (1)				
Adinkra Cloth and Stamp (2 parts)				
Baule Heddle Pulley (1)				

Recycled Aluminum Toy (1)				
Zulu Telephone Wire Basket (1)				

**Check to see if you are low on any supplies (paper, pencils, etc.).  
Let the Tour office know if you need anything replenished.**

Please share! Record visitor questions that “stumped” you and comments or observations you would like to share with fellow guides and staff. If you know the answer to someone's question, please record the answer! Staff will also periodically review questions and try to assist with finding answers.

# Africa Art Cart

## **WHAT IS THE THEME OF THE AFRICAN ART CART?**

All of the items on the Africa Art Cart were chosen for the way in which they ingeniously marry form and function. All are utilitarian or functional in one or more ways (used for dressing, eating, sleeping, making music, etc.). In addition, all are embellished or decorated in diverse and interesting ways, to make them pleasing to the eye and/or touch. Because they were made to be used, they were also made to be handled and both the visual and tactile (and sometimes also aural) properties of each object were carefully considered in their creation.

The objects represent a variety of regions, countries and cultures from throughout the African continent. A wide range of materials and techniques is also represented, underscoring the diversity of African art and culture.

## **WHAT IS THE IMAGE ON THE FRONT OF THE ART CART?**

The image on the front of the African Art Cart is a detail of a Tabwa Mask (Accession Number 89. 14). In recent times, the Tabwa of eastern Congo and northern Zambia have created beaded masks that reflect the carved wooden masks used during the late 19th century. The mask is associated with Tabwa religious specialists. The prominent beaded triangle motif is called "the rising of the new moon" or *balamwezi* symbolizes the dangerous period of darkness between lunar months and the need for care and mediation in all of one's deeds to achieve knowledge and success.

## **WHERE SHOULD THE ART CART BE SET UP IN THE AFRICAN GALLERIES?**

The Africa Art Cart is set up on the second floor landing of the grand marble staircase, just outside the entrance to gallery 250 (Africa). There is normally a wooden bench positioned there, and you can set up the cart just in front of that bench. Please be aware of visitor traffic and keep the landing and path into the galleries as open as possible.

## **WHERE SHOULD THE ART CART BE STORED?**

The Africa Art Cart is stored near the freight elevator, on the second floor. The entrance to this area is through a set of large double doors adjacent to the entrance to the US Bank special exhibition galleries and opposite the Islamic gallery along the main corridor.

The entry to this area is usually secured, and you will need a security guard to unlock the door for you to gain access.

# Kuba Cut-Pile Cloth

## WHAT IS IT?

This rectangular carpet-like mat or cloth is made of woven, embroidered, and tufted raffia fibers. It is decorated with an intricate, geometric design using dyed and embroidered raffia fibers which contrast with the natural tan color of dried raffia.

## WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Cut-pile cloth is produced by Kuba artists from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Kuba live between the confluence of the Kasai and Sankuru Rivers in southeastern DRC. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a Kuba kingdom flourished ruled by a federation of chiefdoms. Each chief was chosen by divine right and had an advisory council of 2-3 members representing both elite and general populations.

Expanding their wealth and influence, the Kuba traded luxury cut-pile cloth and ivory for imported slaves, copper beads, and salt with Europeans and other groups across central Africa. The Kuba empire was stable until infighting caused instability among the chiefdoms. In 1885, the Kuba were incorporated into King Leopold's Congo Free State.

## WHAT IS IT MADE OF?

Made of raffia fibers cultivated from *Raphia farinifera* or raffia palm, these baskets are made from all natural materials. The branches of the raffia palm can reach up to 60ft in length with over 100 palm leaves per branch, making it the palm tree with the largest branches in the world. They grow in tropical regions' wet soil and are native to Africa, Madagascar, and the Philippines. Raffia fibers are harvested from the palm leaves by tearing or cutting parallel strips yielding long, thin, pale green fibers. The fibers are collected and sun-dried, turning the fibers light brown. These dried fibers are soft, pliable, strong, durable, and easy to dye which make them desirable materials for Kuba cut-pile cloths.

## WHO MADE IT?



<http://www.clothroads.com/the-making-of-african-kuba-and-shoowa-raffia-cloth/>

The men harvest and weave the collected raffia fibers into a basic base cloth using a vertical heddle loom (pictured above). The length of the

textile is determined by the natural length of the raffia fibers. The average rectangular cloth measures between 30 x 60cm and 50 x 100cm, approximately between 12 x 24in and 20 x 40in. Individual woven panels known as *mbala* are softened and refined to a linen-like texture by kneading, rubbing, and pounding.

Women dye cloth and embroidery fibers in advance using natural plant dyes to turn the fabric beige, red, black, or brown. Hues vary according to amount of time spent in the dye bath, sun-bleaching, and natural color of the plant fibers ranging from white to light brown.



<http://media-cache-ec0.pinimg.com/236x/af/66/9b/af669bc32b73aec8e73178f63b09ab1c.jpg>

Raffia cloths are cut-pile stitched. This type of stitching takes women months to accomplish as it is worked on intermittently. The seamstress must be dexterous since she holds both the needle and embroidery knife in the same hand. She stitches and cuts tufts simultaneously to get the desired effect.

#### **HOW IS IT USED?**

Individual cut-pile panels were once used as currency in equatorial Africa. Accumulation of the cloths showed an individual's status. They were objects of not only financial exchange but were also given as gifts to the deceased, showing the prestige of the individual and the generosity of the surviving family members or ancestors. Today, even though imported textiles dominate Kuba fashion, raffia textiles are the only suitable garments in which to adorn the deceased.

Traditional clothing for both men and women was produced by sewing several cut-pile pieces together to make a cloth 2-3 meters or 2.2-3.3 yards in length. Women wrapped the cloths around their bodies like strapless dresses while men wrapped the cloths around the waist, securing them with belts. In addition to traditional uses, Kuba cut-pile

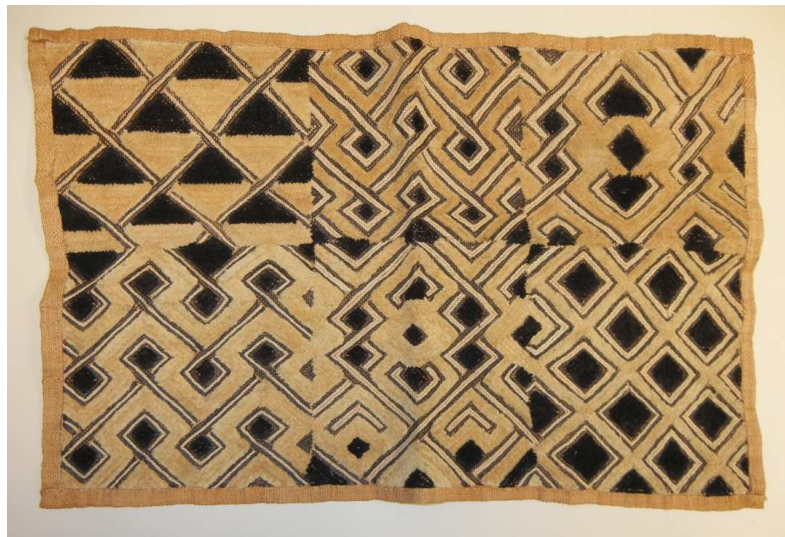


cloth was used to adorn 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Catholic vestments worn by West African priests, as currency by European colonizers, and currently is produced for the tourist and collector markets.

## **KUBA APPLIQUED CLOTH**

The most common technique used in producing Kuba ceremonial garments today is applique. Applique literally means “to put on” in French. In the textile industry, Applique means that pieces of cut cloth are layered onto a foundation fabric to create designs. The edges of the raw fabric pieces are then embellished with decorative stitching to emphasize the applied shapes.

Scholars believe that applique cloths evolved out of the need to patch existing cut-pile cloths. Since the time required to make large appliqued cloth is reduced, the cost for skirts is greatly diminished. Because of the low cost and versatility of the fabric, applique cloths have grown more popular in recent years. The seamstress uses a stencil to cut decorative designs out of a dyed raffia cloth and sew it onto a plain raffia background, similar to the background used for the cut-pile technique.



## **Questions and Activities**

- 1) Invite visitors to feel the surface of the cloth. How does it feel? What do you see or feel that makes you say that? It was often described by 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century explorers and missionaries as “carpet” or “Velvet.”
- 2) Have the visitors compare the Kuba cut-pile cloth to the appliqued one. How are they different? Similar?

- 3) Imagine wearing a skirt made out of 9 yards of cut-pile cloth. What would it feel like? Could you easily dance? Would you be hot? If you had a choice, would you wear the appliqued or cut-pile cloth skirt?

### Collection Connections

- Within the African Galleries visitors can find more examples of textiles in **gallery 236** under the theme Form and Function. Kuba “velvets” were worn during community events to show an individual’s wealth and social status. **Gallery 250** shows other items worn by leading members of African ethnic groups under the theme of Commanding Authority.
  - **Find:** Kuba, *Yet Belt*, Democratic Republic of Congo, 20th c., 89.1
- Cross-culturally:
  - **Tevau or Feather Currency used by**
  - Barkcloth seen in **Gallery 256** is produced in a similar manner to raffia textiles. Both are made out of plant fibers and are woven on looms.
  - Embroidered textiles from India show a different style of embroidery in **Gallery 211**
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# Bamana Mudcloth

## WHAT IS IT?

This mudcloth is a narrow strip of brown cloth decorated with off-white patterns. The cloth is made out of woven cotton and dyed using mud. The fringe on both ends of the single strip of fabric indicates it was used either as a scarf or modern graduation stole.

## WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

Mudcloth or bokolanfini (Bo Ko Lahn FEE Nee) is produced by the Bamana of southwest central Mali. Living in the loop of the Niger River, they developed a unique cooperative agricultural system in which the entire community, as a unit, plows, plants, and harvests fields. The current population of Bamana people is concentrated in the south-West Central region of Mali.

## WHO MADE IT?

The textile is made of locally-grown and woven cotton the initial color of which is off-white. Woven by men on looms in six-inch wide strips, multiple strips are then sewn together to create a larger textile, typically 6 strips wide. The cotton cloth is then put through a mud-dying process called bogolan. Experienced women artists know the bogolan process which is passed down from older to younger women through long apprenticeships.

## HOW IS IT PRODUCED?

The following steps outline the mud-dying process which is a type of resist-dye process.

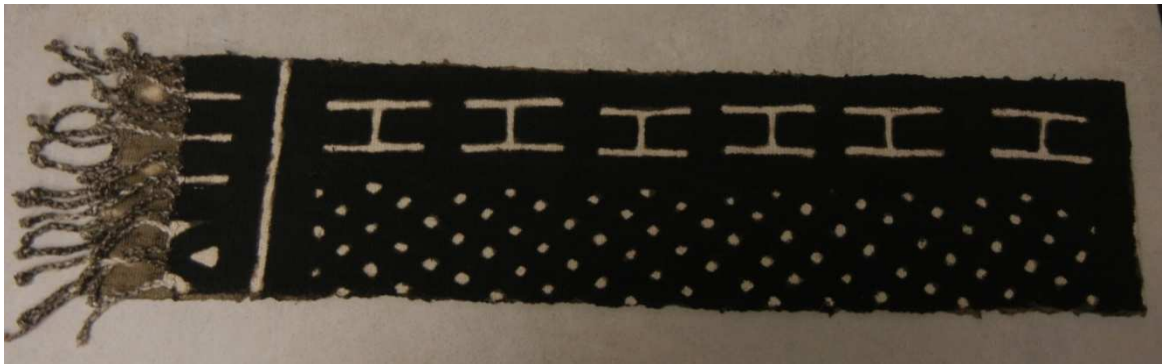
- 1) Pounded leaves high in **tannin** are ground into powder. Water is added to the powder and either brought to a boil or left to steep 24 hours. The plain off-white fabric is soaked in the treated water and left in the sun to dry, turning the fabric light yellow.
- 2) Iron-rich mud from stagnant ponds is collected, aged for one year, and painted on the pre-treated fabric. Shapes are outlined free-handed with the mud. The yellow designs are formed by the undyed areas of the cloth.
- 3) The cloth is once again dried and the cloth is rinsed to clear loose mud, resulting in yellow shapes on brown background. Caustic soda is carefully applied to the yellow shapes to bleach the stains from the cloth, turning the shapes white. The tannin from the water treatment reacts with the iron in the mud, dyeing the cloth. This step is repeated multiple times for darker fabrics.

## HOW IS IT USED?

The designs on mudcloths are exclusively geometric and convey specific knowledge only to those initiated into their meaning. Among the Bamana, specialized knowledge is highly desirable as one means of protection and continuity of traditional Bamana culture. The designs are not read literally like writing, but rather cue people to think about larger concepts involving life and aesthetics.

Women wear mudcloth during their marriage ceremony, wrap their first baby in it, and are eventually buried in it. Cloth can also be presented by young women to their mentors to protect them against sorcery and may be worn by hunters to protect them in the bush.

Mudcloth artists began experimenting with new designs during the postcolonial era, which has witnessed a boom in the tourist market. Since the introduction of European textiles, bogolanfini is worn less frequently although, there is a re-vitalization movement of bogolanfini-inspired art. It appears on mass-produced textiles exported to other countries, in paintings, and remains a cultural identifier for Mali.



## Questions and Activities

- 1) Invite visitors to closely examine the mudcloth strip, paying special attention to the bleached design. How is it similar to other textiles on the Art Cart and/or to the clothing you are wearing? How is it different?
- 2) Mudcloth was worn traditionally by hunters to protect against danger. Do you wear anything to protect you against bad luck? A lucky hat? Shirt? What does your good-luck charm look like? Why is it lucky? How often do you wear it? Do other people who know you recognize it?

## Collection Connections

- A more diverse sample of African textiles and garments can be found in **Gallery 236** under Form and Function theme.
- **Cross-Culturally,**

# Asante Goldweights

## WHAT ARE THEY?

These three small figural statuettes, each no taller than 2 inches, are cast from bronze using the lost wax casting method. These items were used to weigh gold dust, currency among the Akan people of Ghana.

## WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

The Asante live in the forested southern region of Ghana and are a subculture of the dominant Akan culture. Separate Asante chiefdoms were united in 1670 by Osei Tutu forming the Asante Empire. Taking the title Asantehene, Osei Tutu became the first Asante king. At its height, 1801 to 1824, the empire controlled all of modern Ghana. Finance for their expansion came from trading gold and slaves to Europeans and other African empires.

With the Asante expanding their empire closer to the coast, Britain became concerned with instability and disruption of trade. It was not until 1896 with the occupation of Kumasi, the Asante capital, that modern Ghana became a protectorate of the British crown. Two years after an Asante rebellion against the British in 1900, the empire became a British colony.

## WHO MADE IT?

Bronze goldweights were made by Asante metalsmiths using lost wax casting. They are made of bronze and used as a counterweight for measuring out gold dust.

## HOW IS IT PRODUCED?

### *Lost Wax Casting*

1. A full-sized beeswax model is carved by a metalsmith.
2. A casting channel, or *sprue*, is added to the outside of the model. Molten brass is poured into the mold through this channel later in the process.
3. The model and sprue are then covered with several coatings of clay slip (clay mixed with water) and charcoal.
4. Once the clay layers have dried, the end is scraped off the sprue, and the entire mold is heated over a fire until the wax mold and the sprue are melted out to leave a cavity in the shape of the desired weight and a channel by which to access the cavity.
5. The empty mold is set into a clay *crucible* (small bowl-like vessel) that contains the brass to be used for the weight. Both pieces are covered with clay to hold them together.
6. The entire mold is placed into a furnace, with the crucible on the bottom. The brass is heated to a *molten* (liquid) state.
7. The metalsmith picks up the mold around the center with tongs and inverts it so that the molten brass is forced into the empty mold where the wax once was.
8. After the mold cools, it is broken away along with the sprue to reach the metal casting that has been made.
9. The casting is cleaned and polished, and the goldweight is complete.

## HOW WERE THEY USED?

Goldweights were used by Asante to measure gold dust during trading transactions. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, all technology needed to trade with gold was present in Asante culture: gold weights, scales, spoons, and gold dust boxes. Each trader had his own set of weights that were a reflection of his social status or personality. There were an estimated 3 million types of weights produced since the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, with the earliest forms being geometric figures. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, figurative weights symbolic of proverbs and utilitarian objects emerged.

The weight standards were controlled by the Asantehene or king. They changed periodically to align with the systems used by current trading partners. Over a period of several centuries, long-distance and international trade was conducted with North Africa, Portugal, Holland and England, among others, using the goldweight system of measures.

If a weight was too heavy because of miscasting or a change in weight standards, the goldsmith or the owner of the weight could clip off enough brass to bring the weight to its intended weight. If a weight was too light, lead, wire, or chain could be added to the goldweight to increase its overall weight.

The average person would not own weights that weighed more than about 2.25 ounces. Royal weights could weigh as much as six times that much. Our weights (both on the cart and in the gallery) probably belonged to people of average means.

By the 1890s, British coins replaced traditional Asante currency of gold dust. Within fifteen years, production of traditional weights stopped. Due to the collectability of the small weights these items are still produced for the tourist market.

## SYMBOLISM OF WEIGHTS REPRESENTED ON CART

Goldweights, like many elements of Akan culture, represent proverbs that relate to daily life. An individual's knowledge of and ability to speak in proverbs is highly valued in Akan society even today. Each of these three weights relates to a specific proverb, which the trader who used them would have probably been aware of. Note that the design of the goldweight does not relate to its weight or value.

- 1) **Man beating a drum:** *When the face of the drum is there to beat, you do not leave that to beat the side.* Only a coward goes about gossiping when he hears a story; a better person will tell you openly what is being said.
- 2) **Man with offering:** *If a fowl possessed life-giving medicine, would it be taken and sacrificed over fetishes?* Things in life must sometimes be sacrificed or given up in order to ensure health and happiness of the individual and the community.

- 3) **Warrior, Hunter, or Prestige Figure:** *We have been unable to precisely identify the proverb associated with this weight.* Encourage visitors to assess the image and think of moral lessons that might be taught using it.



### Questions and Activities

1. Have visitors weigh each of the three weights in their hands or using the balance scale provided to compare one against the other(s), and determine if they are all weights of the same value or not. Which one(s) are heavier or lighter?
2. Encourage visitors to use the balance scale on the cart to weigh out the correct amount of “gold” for trades. Use the pennies provided as a substitute for gold dust. How do we conduct business transactions? Is there usually barter involved? Would you prefer to have set prices or more barter-oriented transactions? What’s the advantage of being able to barter? Disadvantage?
3. What’s going on with the images of each of these weights? What do you see that makes you say that?
4. How does the weight feel in your hand? What might be some reasons why goldweights were made in such highly decorative and intricate forms (instead of plain brass blocks or cylinders)? How is money used today around the world decorated?
5. What kinds of proverbs, sayings, or morals have you heard people use to illustrate certain points that relate to your own daily life (e.g. The early bird catches the worm; Cheaters never prosper; etc.)? Is there a certain one that you try to live your life by?



### Collection Connections

- Asante Gold weights are extensively profiled study table in **Gallery 250**. It shows the diversity of Asante goldweights and allows individuals to explore, in depth, multiple figures. This is under the gallery theme of Commanding Authority as Asante kings determined the standard weights and used them most often.
- **Japanese netsuke** (netsookeh) found in **Gallery 239** are similar to Akan goldweights both in size and meaning. Netsuke are miniature ivory or wood carvings were originally used as toggles on silk strings to secure bags to men's kimonos. After Japan was opened up to the west in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, netsuke became collectible souvenirs for westerners.
- Cross-culturally, barter and exchange goods are frequently on view:
  - Gallery 256(Oceanic): Tevau, Kapkap
  - Gallery 215 (Chinese): Balance and trade weights
  - Gallery 201 (Chinese): Money tree

# Ewe Shakere

## WHAT IS IT?

This natural, gourd instrument is surrounded by a net woven with beads. The gourd is dry and hollowed producing a rattling sound when shaken. The long neck of the gourd provides a natural handle for the musician.

## WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

This shakere (Shay-kuh-ray) was produced by the Ewe (eh-vāy) people of southeast Ghana. Ewe peoples migrated to the region from northern Togo, initially settling at the mouth of the Volta River. Ewe settlements are governed by male head of the village's founding lineage whose position transfers patrilineally, from father to son. The Dufia is part of a council of Dufias who provide advice to a regional leader. These regions are politically independent, but culturally unified.

## HOW WAS IT PRODUCED?

Shakeres are traditionally made of hollowed-out calabashes or gourds. The gourds are picked from a calabash tree and a hole cut in the top to gut the fruit of seeds and debris. The gourd is then soaked in water for a few days to soften any remaining debris. Once dried, the skin turns hard producing the body of the instrument. A small net is woven onto the gourd, interspersed with beads or seeds which produce noise when slapped against the gourd.

## HOW WAS IT USED?

Among the Ewe, musical associations provide the entertainment during community events. Most communities have only two or three bands. There can be strong competition among bands over gigs, and bands come and go based on their popularity and changes in musical preferences on the part of the community. Bands play at events such as enstoolment (enthronement) ceremonies, weddings, funerals, and initiation celebrations.

Shakeres or axatse (ah-hah-chay) were used by Ewe to accompany drums and other musical performances. Their role in the traditional Ewe drumming sequence is to back-up the bell or Gankogui which keeps time during the song. These musical instruments originated in West Africa, but made their way to the Americas and Caribbean via the slave trade. In a Ewe ensemble, four or five shakere players sat in front of the drummers. They strike the rattle against their thigh and then their hand to support the bell, keeping time for the drummers.



### Questions and Activities

- 1) Shakeres are responsible emphasizing the beat of the bell which keeps time for the drummers. Can you think of any instruments in other music traditions or styles that have A similar function as a shakere?
- 2) Invite visitors to play the shakere Ewe-style. Holding the gourd by the neck, slap it first against the thigh, then palm. This is used to keep time for the drums in a Ewe drum band.
- 3) Other tones can be produced with the shakere. Using the tones listed below; invite visitors to make their rhythm on the shakere.
  - a. "Bass" (B) - Holding the shekere upright or at a slight diagonal, let the weight of the gourd fall on the heel of the hand, releasing a deep, mellow bass tone.
  - b. "Tap" (T) - Using the same hand, lightly slap the bottom of the gourd with the fingertips, producing a sharp, high sound ("tap").
  - c. "Dee" (De) - Toss the weight of the gourd from the bottom hand to the top hand (left to right), without either hand losing contact ("dee"). The gourd should now be horizontal, with the weight resting mostly in the right hand.
  - d. "Daa" (Da) - Toss the weight back to the left hand still maintaining contact with both hand at all times (daa). (This stroke is like that of the bass without using the heel of the hand to bring out bottom sounds.) The shekere should now be in a diagonal position.
  - e. "Shaa" (sha) - Holding the gourd in a horizontal position with the weight resting in both hands, use a sharp wrist action and flip the net away from you in a circular motion (shaa).
  - f. "Ray" (ra) - Flip the net towards you (ray).

\* Beverly Botsford, <http://www.ibiblio.org/musicians/botsford/educators/shekere/>

## Collection Connections

- In the African galleries, more instruments can be viewed in **galleries 250 and 254** under the Performing Dance and Music theme.
- Other musical instruments can be found throughout the museum:

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# Kwere Staff

<b>WHAT IS IT?</b>	The major decoration on this Kwere staff is a nude woman. Her elegantly styled hair enhances her beauty and reinforces community identification. She crouches, possibly on a stool.
<b>WHERE DID IT COME FROM?</b>	The staff comes from the Kwere who are from east-central Tanzania. The Kwere are one of the smallest ethnic groups in the country. They migrated to the area in 1000 CE and formed villages based on kinship. Each kinship group traces affiliation through mother's side of the family, matrilineally. Each kinship group had a male leader who was elected by elders of the lineage. Lineage leaders and other ritual specialists presided over public rituals and figurative staffs lent legitimacy to their ceremonial role. During the 19 <sup>th</sup> century, the Kwere were victimized by the slave trade due to their lack of centralized government for protection. In response, villages became fortified and protected by stockades. In the twentieth century, settlement patterns shifted back to rural homesteads.
<b>HOW WAS IT PRODUCED?</b>	A master carver probably carved this staff out of wood for a lineage leader, lineage elder, or religious specialist.
<b>HOW WAS IT USED?</b>	<p>Throughout Africa, staffs have many functions, are made of various materials, and carry a wide array of meanings. Most staffs are made for men and are decorated to reinforce the owner's status. They are essentially portable symbols of office and status.</p> <p>In general, a staff has political implications: a person holding a staff is symbolically asserting power over other people in a given area. This person may even be viewed as literally leaning on the ancestors—a staff can be a powerful link to the spirit world.</p> <p>Knowledge of the ownership and function of this Kwere staff from Tanzania is now lost to us. Based on knowledge of other Kwere staffs, we can only deduce that the staff was probably owned by a village chief or a religious specialist (diviner) who acted as an intermediary between the human and spirit worlds.</p> <p>Among the Kwere, the right to lead was traditionally traced through the female side of the family, so an image of a woman like this connotes the authority of leadership and reverence for the ancestors. If the female figure refers to an ancestor, her spiritual power would reinforce the authority of the male chief.</p> <p>If a diviner owned this staff, he would have used it to communicate the needs of a client or clients to the spirit world, and to gain protection from the spirits for his clients.</p> <p>Geometric designs frequently decorate staffs' body and often convey additional information. The person holding this staff probably delighted in feeling the rich texture of the densely patterned grip. Staffs that are made to be held often</p>

communicate the idea that spirits, including the ancestors, are literally near at hand



## Questions and Activities

- 1) Invite visitors to hold the staff. How do you feel when holding the staff? What about the staff makes you feel that way? What did you notice about your own pose or posture when you held the staff?
- 2) Look closely at the woman's hairstyle. How many other hairstyles can you find in the gallery? Which, if any, of these hairstyles would you like to wear? What about these hairstyles most appeals to you?
- 3) What kinds of things do you wear or carry to communicate or show your status to other people? What is the most powerful object you own? What makes that object powerful to you? Would it hold the same power for someone else? Why or why not?
- 4) How do political or religious leaders you are familiar with signify their status through their accessories?

## Collection Connections

- This staff connects several of the major themes within the African galleries. More about hair and social status can be found in **Gallery 254** under the theme Expressing Identity. In **Gallery 250** one can find more objects which symbolize an individual's authority under the theme Commanding Authority or explore how other ethnic groups called upon the ancestors for help under the theme Invoking the Invisible.
- **Cross-Culturally,**

# Kente Cloth

## WHAT IS IT?

This loom-woven, hand-stitched Kente cloth is made of colored silk and cotton fibers and comes from Asante people of Ghana.

## WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Akan is the largest ethnic group, composing 48% of Ghana's population. The Asante people, in particular, are well-known kente weavers. Other Akan people and the neighboring Ewe also produce Kente. Asante live in the forested Southern region of Ghana and are a subculture of the dominant Akan culture.

Separate Asante chiefdoms were united in 1670 by Osei Tutu forming the Asante Empire. Taking the title Asantehene, Osei Tutu became the first Asante king. At its height, 1801 to 1824, the empire controlled all of modern Ghana. Finance for their expansion came from trading gold and slaves to Europeans and other African empires.

With the Asante expanding their empire closer to the coast, Britain became concerned with instability and disruption of trade. It was not until 1896 with the occupation of Kumasi, the Asante capital, that modern Ghana became a protectorate of the British Crown. Two years after rebellion from Asante in 1900, the empire became a British colony.

## WHO MADE IT?

Men traditionally are weavers in West Africa. They learn how to weave through apprenticeships with elder weavers beginning at a young age.

## HOW IS IT PRODUCED?

Kente cloths are woven on horizontal treadle looms (See image below), which results in long narrow (about 4-6 inches wide) strips of woven cloth. The loom has two pairs of heddles: the first pair weaves the plain ground (cotton) while the second pair weaves the colored design (silk or rayon).



[http://www2.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/but06/hillwood/african/essays/essay\\_02.html](http://www2.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/but06/hillwood/african/essays/essay_02.html)



The narrow strips are then sewn together by hand to create a larger rectangle of cloth. A good weaver creates strips with patterns that “match up” when pieced together. The result is the alignment of the small rectangular patterned squares. An Asante men’s cloth typically requires 24 strips of cloth from the horizontal treadle loom. The tradition of weaving Kente is passed down from generation to generation. Men traditionally weave the strips, and women sew them together.

Contemporary, commercialized kente is either machine woven from different colored threads (loosely based on kente designs) or contain roller-print designs on the background of machine-woven white cloth, imported from Asia. These textiles are not made in Ghana, but are inexpensive substitutes for traditional strip-woven garments.

## **HOW IS IT USED?**

A prestige item worn during social or religious gatherings, kente was traditionally used by Asante rulers and individuals of high status since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Women are given kente cloths either through marriage or purchased them with their own money.

The colorful, abstract symbols are imbued with meaning which could be interpreted by members of the culture. There are over three hundred different kente cloth designs named for the color and designs used. These designs can allude to proverbs, historical events, or the clan and social status of the wearer. Certain colors in kente cloth also have specific meanings, although these meanings are not universal and can vary from artist to artist and community to community.

Currently, kente designs are being mass-produced in Asia for mass consumption. The symbolism in the traditional garments is lost when the items are mass produced; however, kente has become a pan-African symbol. Outside of Ewe and Akan ethnic regions, machine-woven kente frequently appear at festivals and smaller kente-style stoles are worn by graduates in Africa and the African diaspora.



### Questions and Activities

- 1) Invite visitors to feel the fabric. What makes this textile different than the others on the cart? Similar?
- 2) Kente patterns are imbued with symbolism and can be read by members of certain subcultures. Is there anything you wear that has special significance to you and/or a group of people? What is it? Why is it significant to you? Others? When wearing it, what are you communicating to others? Think of sports teams, company logos, and colors worn to support causes, a growing fad in social media.

### Collection Connections

- More African textiles can be viewed in **Gallery 236**, Designing Form and Function. A prestige item worn during social or religious gatherings, kente was traditionally used by Asante rulers and individuals of high status. In **Gallery 250** one can find more objects which symbolize an individual's authority under the theme Commanding Authority.
- **Cross-Culturally**

# Baule Heddle Pulley

## **OBJECT DESCRIPTION**

Heddle pulleys made and used by the Baule people of Cote d'Ivoire typically have an arch-shaped support for a carved figure. The carved figure is often an animal or animal-human combination. This heddle pulley has a geometric animal head with triangular ears and mouth.

## **WHERE DID IT COME FROM?**

The Baule inhabit the east-central region of Cote d'Ivoire between the Comoe and Bandama Rivers. In 1730, the Baule refused to be part of the Asante Confederacy and migrated to their present location in 1750 under the leadership of Queen Awura Pokou. This fracture followed a dispute over Asante chieftaincy as the Queen was the sister of one of the chiefs slain in the struggle for power in the Asante Confederacy.

During the move, multiple smaller groups were absorbed into the Baule ethnicity. In 1790, quarreling among prominent lineages caused the hierarchical structure, similar to the Asante Confederacy, to disintegrate. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Baule state existed as independent villages linked together by kinship and commerce. Villages were divided into wards which were broken into family compounds. Noted for their egalitarian politics, slaves and women were included in community discussions which were exclusive to men in many other cultures.

The Baule were the last peoples to submit to French rule whose defeat in 1915 finally secured the French Cote d'Ivoire. The Baule had trading partners and were able to procure guns and ammunition by 1898 and were able to fight off French troops with use of guerilla tactics. In 1900, France launched a series of military campaigns with the goal to pacify the group. In 1911, the government burned Baule crops, instigating a famine that crippled Baule resistance. The Baule surrendered to French rule in 1915.

## **WHO MADE IT?**

Women were responsible for cultivating cotton, harvesting it, dying it, and spinning it into threads. Men were responsible for clearing the land used to plant crops and weaving and sewing the threads to make the cloth. Traditionally, women were the owners of the cloth, although this changed once cotton became a cash crop and ultimately a male-dominated activity.

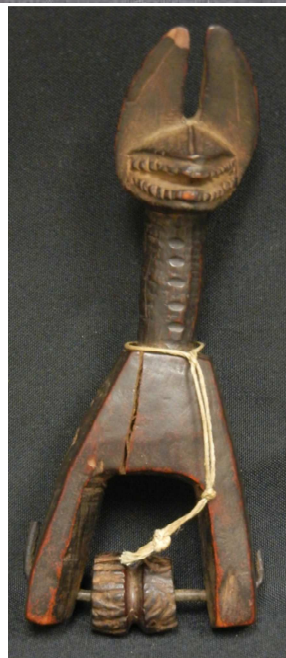
## **WHAT IS IT USED FOR?**

Heddles keep the threads separated and in a specific order according to the pattern the weaver is creating. Heddles are connected to each other through a cord which passes through a pulley from which the name of the object comes. These pulleys are attached to the strings and used to pull the strings up or down depending on where the weaver was in the process.

The loom that held this heddle is similar in style to those used by other ethnic groups throughout West Africa. Called a horizontal narrow-band treadle loom, these types of looms were operated exclusively by males. Similarities amongst them indicate a shared history in the loom over a broad region, alluding to a shared origin in ancient times.

The first cotton textiles appear in Sudan and date to 500-300 BCE. The earliest cotton textiles in West Africa were recovered from Dogon culture in Mali and date to 11th or 12th centuries AD. These fragments are believed by scholars to be woven on a similar type of loom found across Western Africa today. Looms vary slightly from ethnic group to ethnic group but the same basic technology is in use across West Africa.

Since pre-colonial era, the Baule have been trading their woven-strip cloth with other regional groups. The Baule are particularly known for their fine wooden sculpture, particularly religious sculptures of ancestral spirits. Unlike other Baule sculptures, sculpted heddle-pulleys are on public view and can easily be examined when they are at eye-level.



## Questions and Activities

This pulley would be used on a loom set up in a public area, so the weaver was visible and could attract people to his wares. How do local businesses or individual vendors attract shoppers' attention in your community? How are these practices similar to Baule weavers? Different?

## Collection Connections

- More examples of decorated, utilitarian objects can be found in **Gallery 236**, Designing form and Function.
- **Cross-Culturally**,

# Tutsi Baskets

## WHAT ARE THEY?

These small, conical-lidded baskets called **lbeseke** were produced by aristocratic Tutsi women in Rwanda.

## WHERE DOES THEY COME FROM?

Rwanda is a land-locked country in east-central Africa. It was colonized first by the Germans between 1894-1918, and then by the Belgians until 1962, when Rwanda reclaimed its independence. The Tutsi people are one of three cultural groups in Rwanda. They migrated to the region from Ethiopia during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and lived as cattle herders. Once established, the group took political control of the region. After the colonial government dissolved in 1962, a bloody struggle for political power ensued between the majority Hutu and historically ruling minority Tutsi ethnic groups.

## WHO MADE THEM?

Aristocratic Tutsi women produced these fine, small baskets.

## HOW ARE THEY PRODUCED?

Basketry knowledge is passed down matrilineally, from mother to daughter. Women gather flat vegetal strands from sisal and papyrus trees which are then soaked in water for two weeks to make the strands soft. The strands are then beaten with stones and dried before they are woven into baskets. Patterns are created by dyeing grass strands in fruit juices or bark to add patterns to the otherwise plain, brown baskets. baskets for personal use in Rwanda.

## HOW IS IT USED?

lbeseke were made by women of high status who had the time to create these small objects which required skill and time. Valuable objects were stored inside these baskets. The introduction of plastic containers onto the African market, decreased the demand for baskets. Most baskets are produced in factories, although some individuals still produce baskets for personal use in Rwanda.



### Questions and Activities

- 1) Invite visitors to pick up the baskets. Imagine the months of work it took to make the basket. Who would you give it to? What would you put inside? Why?
- 2) Do you have a container you put your prized possessions in? What does it look like? How big is it? Why do you use it? What is your most prized possession?
- 3) Compare the Tutsi basket to the boat-shaped Ethiopian and South African telephone wire baskets on the Art Cart. Feel and observe the differences between materials. How are they similar? Different? Which one would you prefer? Why?

### Collection Connections

- Examples of other containers and basketry can be found in **Gallery 236**, Designing Form and Function.
- **Basketry is common worldwide where grasses thrived.**
  - To see multiple examples of Native American basketry, visit Gallery 259
  - The Japanese made baskets out of a sturdy, native grass called bamboo. Visit Gallery

# Nigerian Talking Drum

## WHAT IS IT?

This is an hourglass-shaped wooden drum with leather tension cords and decorated leather shoulder strap.

## WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Nigeria is the largest and most populated country in Africa. About the size of the state of Texas, it is home to over 250 ethnic groups and 100 languages. The three main ethnic groups are the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbo. Each of these groups has their own territorial government: Yoruba in the southwest, Igbo in the southeast, and Hausa-Fulani in the north.

## WHO MADE IT?

Talking drums are used in East and West Africa, Melanisia, and Southeast Asia. In Nigeria, drums play a dominant role in music ensembles. Talking drums are used by the Hausa and Yoruba of Nigeria. Yoruba and Hausa are tonal languages, and when the strings are tightened and loosened, the drum “talks” in tones which can be recognized by Yoruba and Hausa speakers. Intimate knowledge of the language is needed in order to understand the drum’s words.

## HOW IS IT PRODUCED?

A master drum-carver takes a large piece of wood and whittles it down to the signature hour-glass shape. He first uses an axe to get a rough outline of the drum, switching tools and blades to create a smooth wooden body. The inside of the drum is then hollowed out, initially using an axe. Once the blade can no longer reach the wood, water is poured into the cavity and allowed to sit overnight. This softens the wood enough so a stick can puncture the remaining wood, allowing the wood in the narrow part of the drum to be carved out with a smaller blade. Both the interior and exterior are smoothed and the resonance of the body is tested. Any holes are filled with melted beeswax.

Once the body is carved, the drummer prepares it for playing by adding drum heads and tension strings to it. First, the tension cord is braided from four goat skins. The drum heads, made of two young-goat skins, are prepared. The skin is stretched, soaked in water overnight, and then rubbed with a melon-like fruit to soften it. The hair is removed and the skin scraped thin.

The interior of the wooden drum body is rubbed with animal fat and the prepared skin is stretched over the top. The membrane is sewn simultaneously to the tension cord and a leather frame with goatskin cord. The cords are tightened with twigs and the drum head is tested for tension. The drum is then flipped over and the process is repeated on the second side.

Once the second membrane is secured, the strings are tightened and excess is braided to enable one to replace the head without having to restring the entire instrument. The tension cords are rubbed with animal fat and a customized belt strap is attached to it. The leather belt strap is made by a master leatherworker and is unique to the individual



drummer.

### **HOW IS IT USED?**

Yoruba drummers traditionally used the drums to call and speak to spirits. Today, they accompany both pop and traditional music as a symbol of pan-Yoruba identity. Playing styles and rhythms are regionally diverse. Talking drums are used for sending messages, for dances, and for reciting traditional proverbs.

Only master drummers can get the range of tones required for the drum to talk. The belt strap is hung on the player's left shoulder which positions the drum close to the player's rib cage. The left arm hugs the drum while the player grasps 3-4 sections of tension cord in his left hand. In his right hand, the player grasps a curved mallet used to strike the drum.

High tones are reached by squeezing the hand and arm to put tension on the drum head. Low tones are obtained by releasing the tension. It takes a lot of skill and coordination to reach the range of tones required for the drum to speak.



### Questions and Activities

- 1) Invite visitors to form a band with the musical instruments on the cart. To play the talking drum. Holding the mallet in their dominant (writing) hand they should place the strap over the opposite shoulder allowing the drum to hang down under their arm. Bounce the mallet gently against the membrane of the drum, squeezing the tension strings to obtain a higher pitch and releasing the strings for a lower pitch.
- 2) How many pitches can you make with the drum? If you could communicate a message, what would it say? Who would you send it to? Why?
- 3) Make a song with some friends. Using the drum to create tones and a beat, and perhaps even sing about something you saw in the African galleries or at MIA today!

### Collection Connections

- Drums are a common presence in African music. To see diversity in musical instruments and more drums, visitors can go to **Gallery 250**, Performing Dance and Music.
- Talking drums are used in East and West Africa, Melanasia, and Southeast Asia.
  - To see a talking drum from Papua New Guinea called a Kundu, visit **Gallery 256**.
  -

# Gourd Flask

**WHAT IS IT?** This natural gourd with leather carrying strap was used by East African pastoralists.

**WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?** Gourd flasks were used by multiple East African pastoralist groups. This gourd flask closely resembles Pokot gourd flasks. Pokot peoples live on the north-western savannahs of Kenya. Kenya is on the eastern coast of Africa and borders the Indian Ocean. There are over 42 indigenous ethnic groups in Kenya counting for the majority of its population of 30 million people.

**WHO MADE IT?** Gourd flasks were made, decorated, and used by women in the community.

**HOW IS IT PRODUCED?** Traditionally, containers are made of items found in the semi-arid landscape. Gourd flasks were commonly produced by women to store milk for their children. Gourds were harvested from calabash trees, hollowed, and then dried in the sun to create a light, hollow, and hard vessel. If the hardened skin was thick enough, designs were often incised into the containers.

**HOW IS IT USED?** Throughout Africa, gourds are commonly associated with femininity, fertility, and motherhood. Gourd flasks are used to store milk for children and smaller ones are used as infant bottles. Gourds are also used to store personal items such as animal fat, medicine, tobacco, and other foodstuffs. Plastic and metal containers have replaced many of the gourd containers.



## Questions and Activities

Locate the other containers on the cart. What makes this one unique?

### Collection Connections

- A more diverse sampling of African containers can be found in **Gallery 236**, Designing Form and Function.
- **Cross-culturally**, Gourds and other natural materials have been used for millennia to store foodstuffs and other items. As time passed, new technology allowed ceramic and eventually plastic vessels to be made to replace slightly modified natural containers.
  - Chinese cricket containers, gourd, *Galleries 217, 215*
  -

# Thumb Piano

## WHAT IS IT?

This thumb piano consists of a rectangular hollowed wooden box incised with metal keys.

## WHO MADE IT?

The maker of thumb piano is usually the same person who plays the instrument. Incised images representative of daily life or the spirit realm decorate the instrument. Thumb pianos are often personalized by musicians who make and use them.

## HOW IS IT PRODUCED?

Thumb pianos (also called lamellophones, mbira, likembe, timbrh or kalima in various places) are musical instruments found throughout Africa. The one on the cart comes from Tanzania. Typically, a thumb piano consists of a hollow wooden box or gourd soundboard with metal or bamboo “tongues” or keys that are plucked with the thumb or forefingers to create various pitches.

## HOW IS IT USED?

Each tongue is tuned to produce a different pitch. Shorter tongues produce higher pitched sounds than longer ones. Like most thumb pianos, this one has small clamps or vibration rings around some of the keys. These clamps prolong the length of the vibration created when the key is plucked, allowing the musician to play another pitch while the first continues to vibrate, creating a more complex sound.

Noise can be generated by holding the instrument in the player’s hands or on the lap and by plucking the metal tongues with the thumbs (upward) and/or forefingers (downward).

Thumb pianos commonly provide accompaniment for songs. Songs can be entertaining and/or educational. Many times they are part of spiritual ceremonies and rituals. Songs also often play an important role in the strong oral history tradition found in many parts of Africa. Songs are often important tools for recording and remembering history.



### Questions and Activities

- 1) Invite visitors to play the thumb piano. Noise can be generated by holding the instrument in the player's hands or on the lap and by plucking the metal tongues with the thumbs (upward) and/or forefingers (downward). How would you describe the sound? What mood does it create? How many different pitches can you sound by plucking the tongues?
- 2) Find the other musical instrument(s) and noisemakers on the African Art Cart. Grab some friends and start an "African gallery band," combining the sounds and rhythms of the instruments inspired by an object on the art cart.
- 3) Songs also often play an important role in the strong oral history tradition found in many parts of Africa. Develop a rhythm or melody to accompany a story about *your* life. Chant/rap/sing the story to a friend.
- 4) Think about other ways in which stories can be told. Look around the galleries, both African and cross-culturally, to find examples of different ways of storytelling. What perspective does the artist take? What is present in the work of art? Missing?
- 5) Visit the iTunes store and download the MIA's iAfrica app (free) and play the lamellaphone virtually.

### Collection Connections

- More African musical instruments can be found in **galleries 250 and 254** the Performing Dance and Music theme.
- **Cross-culturally:**

# Ankle Rattles

## WHAT ARE THEY?

Two pairs of rattles on strands of rope. One set is a grid of hollowed brown spheres and the other set is a dense cluster of sliver cocoons attached to a rope and red-cloth backing.

## WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

These rattles were purchased at an *nsangoma* shop in the South African state of KwaZulu-Natal. *Nsangoma* (also *angoma* or *sangoma*) are Zulu religious specialists. Female and male diviners perform rituals and the ritual implements they need are sold at specialized shops and markets. These markets import from a limited geographic area, so it is likely that any goods acquired at nsangoma shops in KwaZulu-Natal come from only as far north as Malawi or Zambia.

KwaZulu-Natal is located in the eastern section of South Africa, and essentially occupies the large tract of land between Lesotho, Swaziland, and the Indian Ocean. Some of the oldest evidence of human activity is found in the region, which is also the ancestral home of the Zulu peoples. A sizeable Indian population also resides in KwaZulu-Natal; the young Mohandas Gandhi arrived in the port city of Durban in 1893 on a legal assignment, and his experiences in the province would inspire his political and cultural activism.

## HOW ARE THEY PRODUCED?

These rattles are crafted from “found” materials, both natural and man-made; this highlights the resourcefulness of the makers. The ankle rattles on the cart are made of two different materials. The first pair are by Zulu people of South Africa and are constructed out of *Argema mimosae* cocoons.

This species of caterpillars is silk-producing which gives the cocoons a natural silver metallic appearance (see photo below). Each cocoon has a seam along one side. After the moth emerges from the cocoon, it is collected and stones or seeds are placed inside and it is sealed up.



Some rattles are sewn with clusters of cocoons like these, while others are attached to a support individually to create a long string, which is wound

around the leg. Similar cocoon rattles are produced among the other Bantu-speaking peoples of Africa, including the Swazi and Sotho, as well as in Central and South American Native cultures. Frequently, these Zulu rattles will be sewn onto the back of a piece of goatskin so that the comfortable fur is in contact with the wearer's legs.



The second pair of leg rattles (pictured above) is made from dried *Oncoba spinosa* fruits. The *Oncoba spinosa* is a small, fruit-bearing, flowering tree that grows in the wetter regions of eastern Africa, from northeastern South Africa to Uganda. It is commonly known in horticultural circles as the "fried egg tree" because its flowers resemble and eggs, sunny-side up.

If the fruits are dried without removing the seeds, they harden and produce a gentle rattling sound. Several fruits are stacked onto wooden dowels, and the ends secured with woven grass. These rows of *Oncoba* fruit are then tied to the leg by means of a jute rope, hand-twisted in the traditional two- or three-strand manner.

This form of rattle is common across a large part of Africa, so the provenance of this pair of rattles is uncertain. However, they very likely originate from southern Africa.

#### **HOW ARE THEY USED?**

Rattles like these are widely produced and used in throughout Sub-Saharan Africa today. They are created both for their traditional uses, as well as for the modern tourist market. Our rattles are typical of modern rattles in this respect, as they are new (dating from about 2002-2005) and have never



been used in their traditional context.

In their traditional context, rattles like these were made for use both in spiritual and ritual dances, but also for general community celebrations. Rattles like these are worn tied around the shin or the side of the calf, so that the wearer's dancing will produce a particular rhythm.

There are hundreds of different kinds of percussion instruments used across Africa, and each provides a unique set of sounds. To separate these various competing rhythms, each instrument typically produces a sound with a distinctive tonality and resonance; for example, drums will produce louder, more definite sounds with a deeper resonance than these rattles, which provide a softer, lighter, and more diffuse sound. These tones might also be contrasted with the clear, high sounds of metal bells, or with the short, crisp sounds of wooden blocks, which might be struck like a bell or scraped with a stick along a series of grooves.



### Questions and Activities

1. Traditionally, rattles like these were worn in ceremonial, religious, and community celebration contexts. What kinds of noisemakers are used in these contexts in your own community? How are they similar to the leg rattles? Different?
2. Find a partner and each of you put on one of the pairs of rattles. Listen to the sounds they make and compare how each pair looks and sounds similar or different from the other. Try them out! Dance to create rhythmic patterns.
3. Rattles are used around the world. Find other rattles in the Native American galleries. What are the similarities and differences among these Native rattles?

## Collection Connections

- More dance paraphernalia and noisemakers can be found in **Galleries 250 and 254**, Performing Dance and Music.
- **Cross-culturally, other items have been used to accentuate rhythms during ceremonial dance and movement.**
  - Look at rattles from various Native American tribes in gallery 261
  -

# Ethiopian Headrests

## WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Two wooden headrests from Ethiopia.

## BRIEF HISTORY OF AFRICAN HEADRESTS

The oldest known headrests of Africa are from ancient Egypt, and seem to have appeared around 2600 BCE. Ancient Egyptian headrests were often placed in tombs and wooden examples known today were primarily preserved because of the dry desert atmosphere. Ancient wooden headrests from other parts of Africa did not fare as well, and many were lost to wetter sub-Saharan climate or to termites.

However, archaeologists have discovered a few types of ancient wooden headrests that have been preserved. Some of these were found in dry sealed caves in Mali, the same region where the MIA's Djenne equestrian figure was discovered. These early wooden headrests were found interred with the communal graves of the people known as the Tellem, predecessors of the Dogon people of Mali. They date from the 11th to 12th centuries CE. There are also bits of evidence pointing to the ancient existence of headrests in central and southern Africa.

## WHAT DO THE ONES ON THE CART LOOK LIKE? WHO MADE THEM?

Artistic style is one of the ways in which Africans assert their identities within the continent and community, and through which cultural groups can establish their differences or highlight their similarities. Thus, the shape and decoration of a headrest offers clues to the culture that made it and, among many African peoples, the social rank of its owner.

The two headrests on the Africa Art Cart were made in the 20th century in Ethiopia. The headrest supported by a stacked conical base (pictured below, right) and decorated carved with a triangular pattern closely resembles those used by the Gurage (goor-AH-gay) and Kaffa (KAH-FAH) peoples. The Kaffa people frequently use a stacked base for their headrests, while the Gurage are known for incised linear patterns on their woodwork. The headrest in the Art Cart prominently features both of these characteristics, so a precise identification of its maker is difficult.



The rectangular headrest (pictured above, left) with its flat supports

and densely incised linear decoration closely resembles those of the Kambatta (kahm-BAH-tah), Sidamo (see-DAH-mo), and Arussi (ah-ROO-see) peoples, who live to the west of the Gurage.

Despite their small size, headrests can be highly expressive sculptures representing African art and design at its finest. The basic headrest design is a curving head support wood raised above a broad wooden base. Each culture or community has its own traditions and artistic canons. So, like many other African objects used for daily and ritual use, the style, proportions, and decoration of a headrest will depend on the guidelines and aesthetic preferences within a region or culture.

## **HOW ARE THEY MADE?**

Wood is the most common material used for headrests, although other materials such as ivory, earthenware, and metal are occasionally used. Metal in the form of strips, nails and wire often adorn wooden headrests. In many traditional African cultures, ivory and metal are symbols of status, so headrests featuring these materials are reserved for high-status individuals.

Among the Gurage, wood carving is done by the men of a low-level caste of craftsmen known as the *Fuga* (FOO-gah), or by some member of the ordinary *Zhera* (ZER-ah) social class. They use several different kinds of wood which, according to one *Fuga* carver, must be harvested “on a moonless night when there are few insects,” (Silverman, 125) dried for two weeks, roughly cut into a headrest, bed, or other household good, and dried for two weeks more. Then, the carver refines the shape of his piece, and it is brightly painted in red, green, yellow, pink, or purple. Finally, the incised geometric design is added. Women and children sometimes assist the carver in the painting and incising of his work.

Over years of use, many headrests are polished with palm oil, butter, or another fatty substance. Through repetitive polishing, the headrest acquires a rich, dark patina like the two on the art cart.

## **HOW ARE THEY USED?**

Many African peoples traditionally slept on mats, and some of the semi-nomadic cultures in East Africa still do so today. A wooden headrest adds comfort to a night’s rest by keeping the spine aligned. When reclining on one’s back, the headrest can be placed at the base of the neck. When reclining on one’s side, more common sleeping position, it is placed under the ear and along the side of the jaw to cradle the whole head.

Scholars who have worked in East Africa where pastoralists continue to use wooden headrests note that:

“Headrests are not as uncomfortable as many people assume. In fact, Africans say the nerves in the head are slightly numbed by the pressure of the headrest producing a pleasant tranquilizing effect that leads to a deep sleep.”  
(*Sleeping Beauties*, 1993)

Headrests not only provide comfort; they also protect elaborate

coiffures from damage while a person sleeps. Beauty and identification are not the only reasons numerous African cultures create ornate hairstyles. Throughout much of Africa the head is considered to be a primary seat of power and the locus of wisdom and the practice of adorning the head and hair partly stems from this widespread belief. Complex coiffures can take hours or even days to construct, and are often embellished with feathers, colored mud, or religious amulets and symbols. They communicate a person's age, gender, rank, status, or accomplishments to others, and convey spiritual strength to the wearer. Because hairstyles are such an important statement of personal identity, Africans are very careful to preserve their coiffures, and headrests are very important as a means of doing so.

In some African cultures, people believe the dreams one has while sleeping on a headrest are revealing, and can become conduits for ancestral spirits; hence, the description "*pillow of dreams*." The significance of such dreams is underscored by divination practices in which miniature headrests are part of a diviner's accessories and are used to interpret a person's problems through their dreams.

The ways in which headrests are used vary from culture to culture. In some traditions, only men may sleep with a headrest, while in others they are used only by women, or by everyone. Quite often, they are small and lightweight, and designed to be easily transported. The string knotted around the base of one of the headrest on the Art Cart might be used to carry it when not in use. Among the nomadic peoples of East Africa headrests are multifunctional, as they are also sometimes used as stools.



**Left:** rectangular headrest closely resembles those of the Kambatta (kahm-BAH-tah), Sidamo (see-DAH-mo), and Arussi (ah-ROO-see) peoples who live to the west of the Gurage.

**Right:** headrest supported by a stacked conical base resembles those used by the Gurage (goor-AH-gay) and Kaffa (KAH-FAH) peoples.

### Questions and Activities

- 1) Have visitors to compare the two headrests on the Art Cart. How are they similar? Different? Which one would you rather use? Why?
- 2) Invite visitors to try out the headrests using the mat provided. When reclining on one's back, the headrest can be placed at the base of the neck. When reclining on one's side, more common sleeping position, it is placed under the ear and along the side of the jaw to cradle the whole head. Is it more or less comfortable than you imagined? Which of the two do you prefer?

### Collection Connections

- More examples of headrests can be found in **Gallery 254** Expressing Identity (hair). Headrests were used to protect elaborate coiffures which marked an individual's social status within the community.
- **Cross-cultural examples**
  - Chinese ceramic pillows, **Gallery 204**
  -

# Love-Letter Necklace

## WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

This white beaded square panel is decorated with black, orange, and green geometric designs and plastic buttons attached to two strands of beads.

## WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

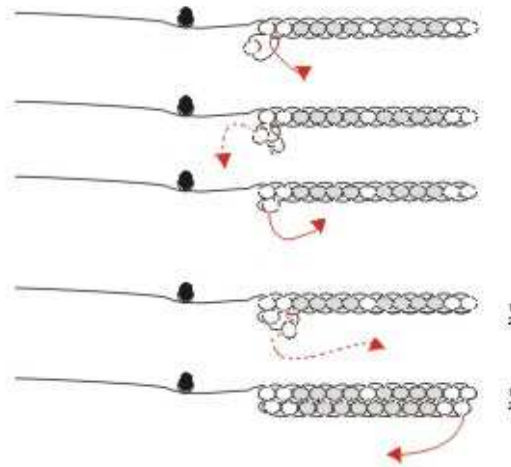
It came from the Xhosa (koh-suh) people of South Africa, who live in Eastern Cape Province. By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, trade routes had been established linking South African pastoralists along the Limpopo River Valley with Arab traders in Mozambique and Tanzania. The groups traded ivory, animal skins, and other local goods for colored glass beads.

## WHO MADE IT?

Xhosa is a language group counting for 18% of South Africa's population. Living in predominately rural areas of Eastern Cape Province, the group is further divided into smaller subcultures. Xhosa are descendants of Bantu-speakers who migrated to the region from modern-day Nigeria in 200 CE. Traditionally cattle-raising peoples, they now rely on migrant labor work in cities. Individuals send money back home to cover basic family needs. They are known for rich literature, folklore, oratory, and poetry skills.

## HOW IS IT PRODUCED?

Brick-stitch beading is commonly used in South African beadwork. Brick-stitch beading produces tight rows of slightly staggered beads, not unlike a brick wall.



<http://www.rings-things.com/resources/projects/68002-8.html#.UqrAtOqo7tQ>

- 1) Each new bead is threaded onto a strand of thread
- 2) The thread running through the added bead is then threaded under a loop running through the previous row of beads and then back through the bead.
- 3) The beader continues adding beads in this manner to produce a firm, net-like panel of beads. Brick-stitch beading is commonly decorated with triangles, diagonal lines, and zig-zags because the staggered rows have a naturally diagonal movement.

## HOW IS IT USED?

A girl may bead a “love letter” for a boy she admires or a woman may bead symbolic patterns to express her relationship with her husband and other loved ones. Symbols, both color and geometric designs, are locally specific. If the necklace was read by an outsider, the message would be interpreted differently.

Love-letters became popular as husbands started working in South African mines and fields far away from home. Wives would bead these flat panels with symbolic motifs and send them via mail to their husbands. Love letters have become one of the most popular South African curios today. They send a universal message of love, beauty, hope, joy, industry, diversity, and brotherhood.



## Questions and Activities

- 1) Invite visitors to pick up the love letter necklace and try it on. How is it different from jewelry you wear or see people wearing today? How is it different from the other jewelry on the cart?
- 2) “Love letter” necklaces are beaded by women and given to men they admire or worn to illustrate their relationships with others in the community. Can you think of any type of jewelry people wear that is similar to the significance of a love letter necklace?

## Collection Connections

- More items of personal adornment from diverse African ethnicities can be found in **Gallery 254, Expressing Identity**. Here there are more examples of beadwork, jewelry, and hairstyles all of which communicates an individual’s social standing within a community.
- **Cross-culturally, items of personal adornment include**



# Recycled Aluminum Toy

## WHAT IS IT?

This eight-inch tall red giraffe made of recycled aluminum strips of Coca-Cola cans on a heavy wire frame. The model is mounted on a wooden base for easy handling.

## WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

This particular item comes from African Home, an organization founded in 2002 by South African women to enable artists to sell their goods on the global market. The organization employs five-hundred artisans who produce diverse crafts.

## WHO MADE IT?

Victor Chiteura, Zimbabwean asylum seeker, leads a group of artisans from the Cape Town area in creating miniature recycled aluminum sculptures like the one on the Art Cart. He is one of the over 500 artisans employed by African Home to create items for the global market.

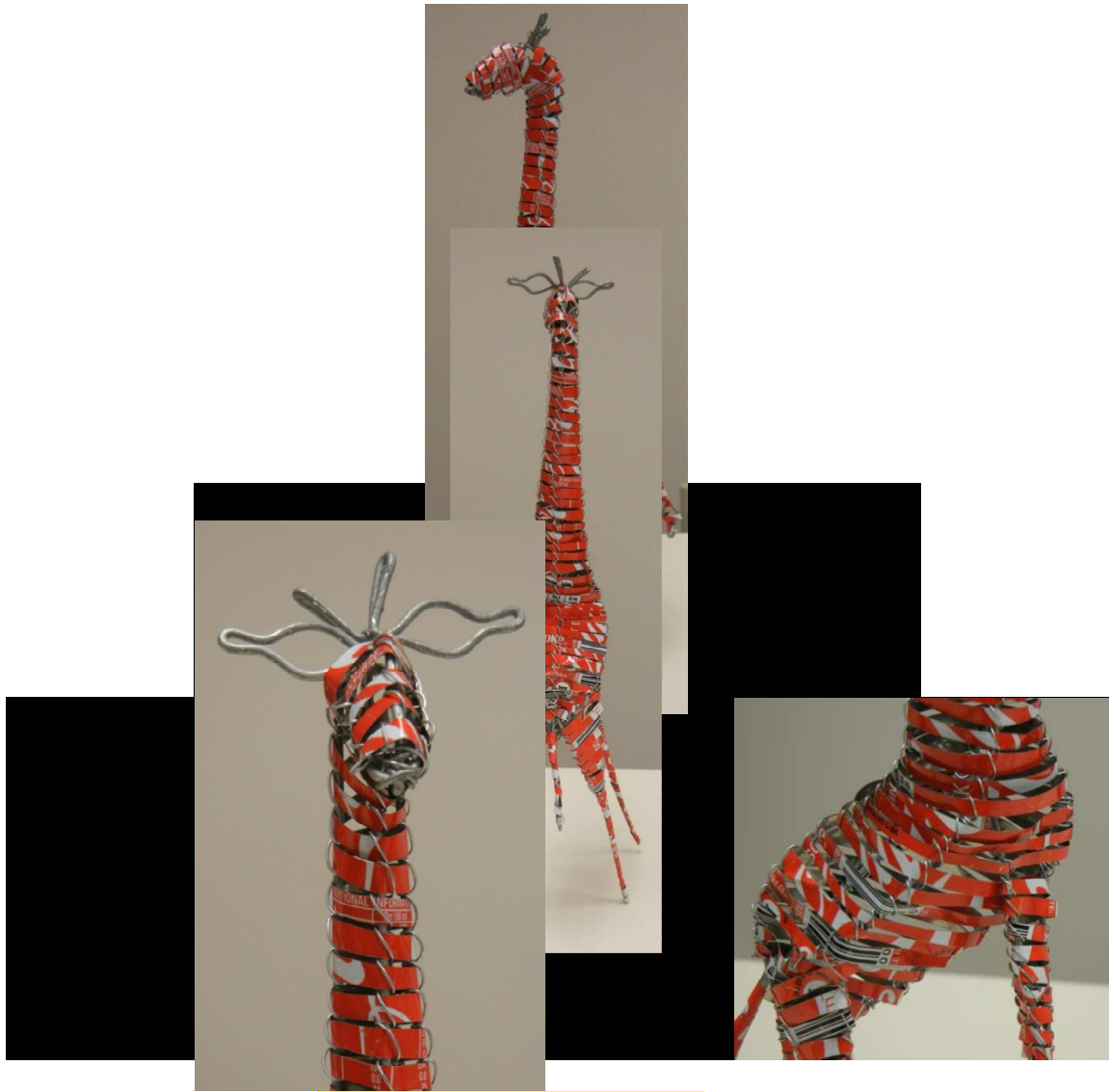
The United Nation states that approximately 2% of people in non-industrialized countries make a living from refuse discarded by the richest 10 to 20%. Individuals spend hours sorting through refuse piles in order to sell aluminum, glass, and other salvageable items to industrial and individual recyclers. Most of the materials scavenged from refuse piles are melted down or modified to make everyday items like utensils, shoes, lanterns, coffee pots, and pitchers. Many urban centers in Africa and around the world have come to rely on refuse from the food and automobile industry to make household items. Unsurprisingly, most of the reclaimed items have western logos and brand names.

## HOW IS IT PRODUCED?

Toys are inspired by the craftspeople's everyday life, their dreams, and knowledge of Western taste. Seen for the first time in the 1980s, today these tiny works of art are commonly found in African markets and import shops around the world. . Specific toy workshops and individual craftspeople are rarely recognized.

## HOW IS IT USED?

Recycled toys are an independent crafts branch of African economy which ensures the survival of millions of people. Aluminum cans and other packaging is cut down and reworked into these small toys. Craftspeople buy raw goods from a middleman or processor which has been collected by other individuals from refuse piles. Materials, design and technique are unique to each craftspeople so no two toys are identical.



### Questions and Activities

- 1) Look closely at the giraffe sculpture. What is it made out of? How is this material different from toys that you play with?
- 2) For fun recycled craft projects visit

### Collection Connections

- This recycled aluminum toy brings to the forefront issues of globalization in Africa. In **Gallery 254**, one can explore a different side of globalization with the theme Connecting with World Religions.
- In the contemporary galleries, there has been a movement towards recycled art.

# Heishi Necklaces

## WHAT IS IT?

These necklaces are long, single-strands of red and black flat disk beads made of plastic and coconut shell.

## WHO MADE IT?

Folklore has it that these beads were cut from old phonograph and vinyl records due to their shape and thickness. Unlike popular belief, these beads were manufactured in Europe by filling molds with plastic. The earliest form of plastic traded with West Africa was Vulcanite, a hardened rubber patented in 1846 by Goodyear Tire Company. By adding sulfur, rubber, and colored pigment colorful beads of diverse sizes and shapes could be mass produced. The first plastic necklaces in Africa date to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## WHAT IS HEISHI?

Heishi is a Pueblo term, literally meaning shell. Traditional Heishi is made by the Santo Domingo Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and are small shell disc beads with holes drilled in the center, strung on a single string of graduating-sized pieces. Currently, the term heishi is used to describe thin, round beads (both natural and mass produced materials) with holes drilled in the center, regardless of where the beads came from.

## HOW IS IT MADE?

Heishi necklaces, made from natural raw materials or man-made plastics, are made in the same way. The desired raw materials are collected and a hole is drilled in the center of each piece of material which is then strung onto a strand of wire, raffia, or string. Once the strand of beads is complete, small sections of the necklace are meticulously ground smooth using a grinding stone. This treatment smooths, polishes, and shapes the disks into a uniform strand of beads.

## HOW IS IT USED?

Beaded necklaces marked an individual's social status within a community. Worn as symbols of wealth, age, marital and social status necklaces were important not only for displaying prestige and wealth but also communicating one's status within the community. The more intricate the beadwork, typically the more prestigious an individual was. The beads were initially made of natural materials found in close proximity to particular ethnic groups.

The earliest African necklaces date to 10,000BCE found in Libya and Sudan are made of ostrich eggshells. Other early material includes seeds, nuts, shells, bones, tusks, stone, and teeth. Glass beads are the most common form of African adornment and were imported **FROM:** before the Common Era. Once European trade routes **DATE** were established, colorful glass beads tended to dominate over the natural beads. For the majority of pastoral tribes, ornamentation of the body is used to indicate status in the community. Since the accumulation of items is inconvenient, many invest in jewelry to illustrate their social standing within the community without being weighed down by too many possessions.



### Questions and Activities

- 1) Invite visitors to pick up the necklaces and try them on. Compare these necklaces to the “love letter” on the African Art Cart. How are the two styles similar? Different? Which would you prefer to wear?
- 2) Necklaces like the heshi ones on the cart are worn by individuals to convey their social status within the community. Can you think of jewelry or other items of clothing that you wear which communicates social status?

## Collection Connections

- More items of personal adornment from diverse African ethnicities can be found in **Gallery 254, Expressing Identity**. Here there are more examples of beadwork, jewelry, and hairstyles all of which communicates an individual's social standing within a community.
- **Cross-Cultural Connections**

## Telephone Wire Basket

<p><b>WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?</b></p>	<p>This medium-sized basket has a white background with a swirling red, green, and light blue design. This particular design was first seen in 1980, soon after South African telephone wire baskets became popular in the Western market.</p>
<p><b>WHO MADE IT?</b></p>	<p>Zulu night watchmen in Johannesburg and Durban in South Africa started producing telephone wire baskets to pass the time. With no clear origin, wire basketry is thought to have been initially produced in 1950 with wire left over from rock-blasting operations. After the colorful baskets became popular in Europe and North America, refugees began to produce telephone wire baskets to have income while in camps.</p>
<p><b>HOW IS IT PRODUCED?</b></p>	<p>Zulu women traditionally produced all basketry out of natural fibers. The outside of traditional baskets were decorated with beads and dyed strands were used to make patterns. Telephone wire was not used as a replacement for vegetal strands until 1950. The colors of the telephone wires eliminate the laborious task of hand-beading the baskets.</p> <p>Artists do not coil the wire but weave it around a plastic or fiberglass form combining patterns of spirals, swirls and dots. This is called soft weaving technique. For soft wire weaving the artist begins with a wire ring at the top, which is the size of the lip of the bowl. Long strands of wire are tied, approximately one wire every half inch, along the top frame.</p> <p>Artists select the color and length of the wire which is purchased from retailers. The color is dependent upon the design the basket weaver wants to make and the length is determined by the depth of the vessel. When the frame is covered with wire, the artist can begin to weave the long hanging pieces. The basket maker weaves the strands around a mold, commonly a round bowl. He starts at the top of the basket and weaves down to the center of the basket.</p>
<p><b>DIFFERENCES IN IMBEGNE AND BOWLS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Imbegne: Beer Pot covers that were decorated (flat-bottom with loops to hang and lift the cover on and off the pot). This was the first type of basketry produced by Zulu nightwatchmen</li> <li>- Since then, more westernized styles have been produced with a more rounded shape.</li> </ul>
<p><b>HOW IS IT USED?</b></p>	<p>Wire imbegne is used to cover beer pots and as table centerpieces. The telephone wire imbegne initially bared a striking resemblance</p>

	<p>to its natural counterpart which was decorated with beads. The colors of the telephone wires eliminate the laborious task of hand-beading the imbegne.</p> <p>As wire imbegne spread to the tourist market, westernized versions of imbegne spread. Now one can readily find a hoop-top basket with a smooth, flat, tightly-woven base (much like western bowls instead of the beer pot covers they were traditionally used for). As the baskets reached mainstream markets in the west, refugees began making the baskets as a way to support their families.</p>





### Questions and Activities

Compare the South African telephone wire basket to the boat-shaped Ethiopian and conical tutsi baskets. Feel and observe the differences between materials. How are they similar? Different? Which one would do you prefer? Why?

### Collection Connections

- Examples of other containers and basketry can be found in **Gallery 236**, Designing Form and Function.
- Other examples of basketry can be found throughout the museum.

## Adinkra Cloth

### WHAT IS IT?

This cloth is dyed dark-green cotton cloth with blocks of symbols hand-printed onto it. The cloth is made of three different sections which are sewn together with brightly-colored thread.

### WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

The Asante live in the forested Southern region of Ghana and are a subculture of dominant Akan culture. Separate Asante chiefdoms were united in 1670 by Osei Tutu forming the Asante empire.

Taking the title Asantehene, Osei Tutu became the first Asante king. At



its height, 1801 to 1824, the Empire controlled all of modern Ghana. Finance for their expansion came from trading gold and slaves to Europeans and other African empires.

With the Asante expanding their empire closer to the coast, Britain became concerned with instability and disruption of trade. It was not until 1896 with the occupation of Kumasi, the Asante capital, that modern Ghana became a protectorate of the British Crown. Two years after rebellion from Asante in 1900, the empire became a British colony.

### **WHO MADE IT?**

Adinkra or “saying goodbye cloth” is traditionally made by an expert artist who learned the craft from his father. Men traditionally wove and stamped the textile while women produced the *auduro* or dye used by male artists. Sons were introduced to the craft at an early age and developed their skills as apprentices to their fathers.

### **HOW IS IT PRODUCED?**

The process for making hand-printed adinkra cloth has remained virtually unchanged since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when the technique was first developed.

- 1) Strips of cotton cloth are dyed in traditional colors: Yellow, red, brown, indigo
- 2) Men hand stitch dyed strips together with brightly colored stitching to form the background cloth for the garment.
- 3) Women make the black pigment or *auduro* used to stamp designs on the cloth. It is a thick, dark pigment produced made from inner bark of a badie tree and water. The inner bark is soaked for 24 hours, pounded in a mortar, and then boiled with iron slag (byproduct of blacksmithing) for four hours. The solution is then strained and boiled for an additional four hours.
- 4) Men draw a grid on the cloth using a comb dipped in the pigment and use calabash stamps, carved by a different specialist, to fill in the grid with symbols. Each square contains multiple rows of the same symbol.
- 5) The cloth is left to dry. If the hand-stamped adinkra is washed, the process has to be repeated to refresh the cloth when it fades.

### **HOW IS IT USED?**

Since hand-stamped cloths are expensive, artists have used screen printing to make more affordable adaptations of the traditional textile. Stenciled translations of traditional symbols are drawn on a computer or free hand. These drawings are cut into the screen and the artist squeegees water-based ink over the top, producing a modern twist on the textile.

Adinkra or “saying goodbye cloth” is traditionally worn by high status individuals during morning rituals by the Asante and Ewe. These cloths contain stamped symbols associated with specific proverbs and sayings relating to the deceased’s family history and personality. Men

wrap adinkra around their bodies like kente, leaving one of their shoulders exposed, while women wear smaller versions of head, upper torso, and lower body wraps.

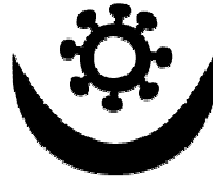
There are over 1,000 individual symbols and a few hundred adinkra motifs documented. The majority of the motifs are over 100 years old, only two-hundred of which are in circulation today.

Adinkra symbols are popular in Ghana today, not only in the form of cloth but are also incorporated into jewelry, advertisements, and architectural decorations.

There are six different symbols on the Art Cart adinkra cloth, two of which are different interpretations of the same symbol.



- 1) **Adinkrahene** (Ah-dink-kra-hen-knee) is the chief of all adinkra symbols. It represents greatness, charisma, and leadership all of which are valued qualities in a good leader. Composed of concentric circles, it forms the basis of several other Adinkra designs. On the Art Cart adinkra cloth, there are two Adinkrahene symbols. The stamp is a third form of Adinkrahene.



- 2) **Osram ne nsoromma** (o-srahm nay n-soar-row-mah) is a feminine symbol reflecting the harmony which exists between a man and woman. The proverb associated with this symbol states that “ *The North Pole Star has great love for marriage. She is always in the sky and waiting for her husband, the moon, to return.*”The moral of the proverb is mutual cooperation is the essence of a good marriage.



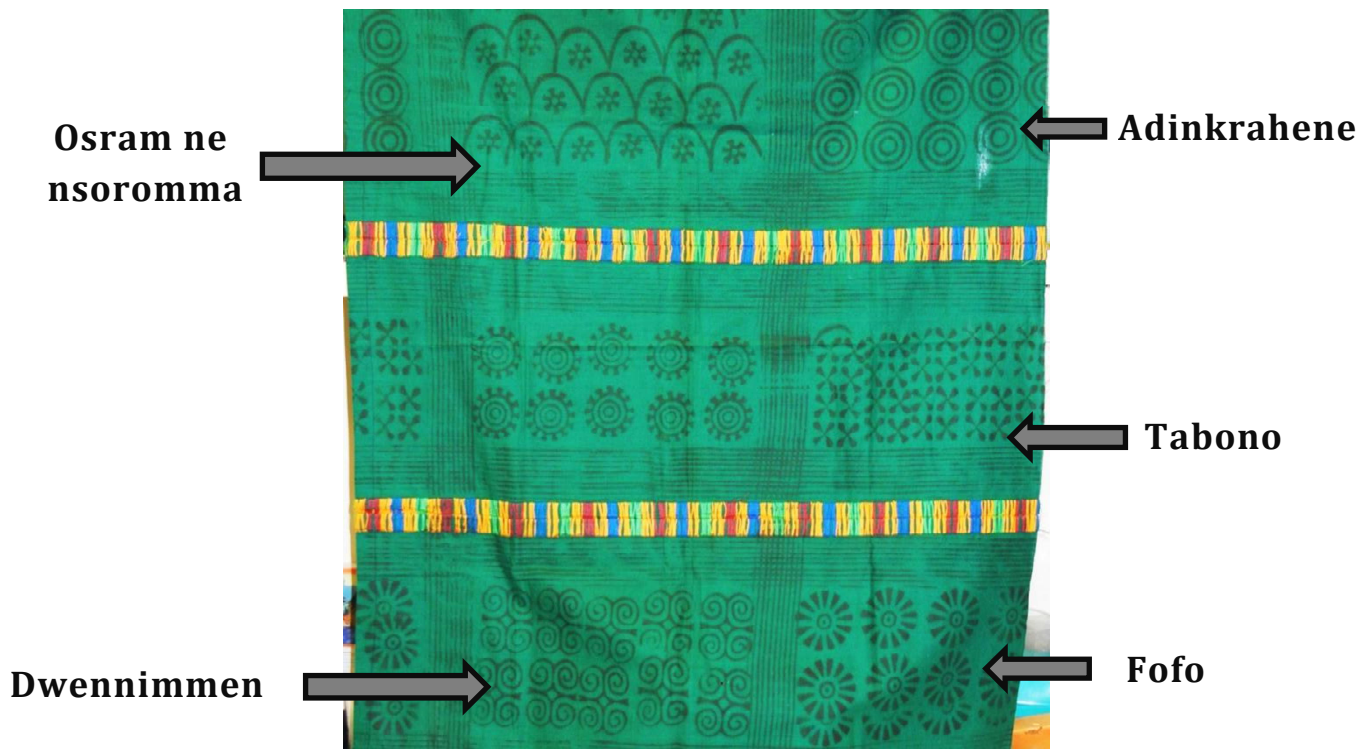
- 3) **Tabono** (tah-bow-no) symbolizes a paddle or oar. Oarsmen need to have strong conviction, possess endurance, and use power to successfully maneuver the boat. In adinkra, tabono reflects the values of strength, confidence, and persistence.



- 4) **Fofa** (foo-foo) is a symbol of warning against jealousy and covetousness. The fofa plant has small yellow flowers whose petals turn to black spikes when they fall from the plant. The Akan liken the fofa plant to a jealous person and the lesson of the flower is that one should never let lack of success or the things one does not have impair enjoyment and celebration of life and personhood.



- 5) **Dwennimmen** (Djwin-knee-mann) or Ram's horns symbolizes strength (in mind, body, and spirit), humility, wisdom, and learning. A proverb commonly associated with the symbol states "*The ram may bulley, not with its horns, but with his heart.*" The Akan see the ram as a graceful, elegant animal that is equipped with deadly horns yet it rarely chooses to use his horns. The strength of the ram therefore resides in its integrity of heart and not in its forcefulness.



### Questions and Activities

- 1) Adinkra cloth combines symbols and proverbs to narrate an individual's family history and personality. Worn by close family members and friends upon mourning rituals, it celebrates the individual's life. If you had to choose symbols for an adinkra cloth, what story would it narrate? Why?
- 2)

### Collection Connections

- More African textiles can be viewed in **Gallery 236**, Designing Form and Function. Traditionally worn by individuals of elite status during mourning rituals, more objects used during funerary rituals can be found in **Gallery 250** under the theme Invoking the Invisible.
- Cross-culturally, there are many customs, clothing, and items associated with mourning rituals.