

Ere Ibeji (Twin Figure)

circa 1925-1940

Yoruba peoples, Nigeria

carved wood, plastic beads, blue pigment, and metal

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The *ere ibeji* is created by the Yoruba peoples of Nigeria to commemorate the death of a twin. The Yoruba has the highest rate of twin births in the world, with four times more twin births than average. In Yoruba society, twins are powerful beings that can either bring harm or fortune to their parents, particularly their mothers. Camwood powder, white chalk, and indigo are applied to the figure to show motherly love and dedication to *Shango*, the god of twins. *Shango* is sometimes known as *Oko Ibeji*, or “the husband of twins”. The sculpture is “fed” by rubbing food into the mouth, which erodes the face. The disproportionate body indicates that the spirit resides in the enlarged head.

UMMA’s *ere ibeji* wears a band of black beads around its waist to symbolize protection from *Abiku*, the god of those born to die. The brass rings around the ankle symbolize worship of *Aro*, and the blue beads indicate that the mother worships *Oshun*, goddess of the healing waters. The blue-painted hair and calm face symbolize cool countenance or *itutu*, a virtue in Yoruba society. The red beads, hairstyle, and rubbing with red camwood powder indicate worship of *Shango*, god of thunder and the protector of twins. The facial markings indicate the family and place of origin within Yoruba society. The various materials used show the history of knowledge exchange experienced by the Yoruba people.

written by **Blake Bellistri**