

Mother and child figure

circa 1890

Yombe group, Kongo peoples

wood, brass tacks, and mirror fragments

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This *pfemba* sculpture, which means mother and child in the Yombe language, exemplifies the respect and prestige that was given to the birth-giving mother. The tight-fitting hat is only worn by chiefs and noblewomen who are destined to give birth to future nobility. The brass tacks on the forehead and small mirrors inserted in the eyes are clear signs of prestige. The mirrors are designed to reflect the color white which is associated with spiritual powers. This evokes the white light reflected off the coastal waters of Africa. The chiseled teeth and scarification are additional symbols of prestige reserved for royalty.

In this *pfemba*, the mother figure highlights the importance placed on fertility and the implied future generations. There was a real power the Yombe gave to women due to this important responsibility.

written by **Alex Nevin**