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Review
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different places did chiefs consider and why? What does official residence versus *bari* assembly place versus other sites convey about the paramount chief's role, authority, or personality? Several portraits angle up to the chief (e.g., the chief was on steps and Viditz-Ward below)—whose choice was this and why? Such a summary would have provided some of the aspects of cultural significance that were missing from the exhibition, and simultaneously communicated a sense of the idioms through which knowledge, power, and authority are discussed and understood. Without some representation of the chiefs' voices, the claimed collaboration seemed a very controlled kind of cooperation, a sadly ironic pseudo-empowerment that devoiced people whose authority and power are constituted in part through their ability to mediate, communicate, and speak eloquently and persuasively.

To fault the exhibition both for portraying paramount chieftaincy uncritically and for failing to include the chiefs' own views is to voice two criticisms that are not entirely compatible. The project's multiple goals required some choices of orientation and emphasis to make the combination work. The failure to choose among its goals produced an uneven combination that left the exhibition open to both criticisms.

The portraits on display included a number of striking images, showed intriguing people who often communicated a strong personal presence, and provided a good visual sense of the range of age and variety of costume involved in paramount chieftaincy. There were welcome biographical glimpses of some chiefs: their other occupations, educational achievements, international connections, contemporary development concerns, the logistics of marriage to another chief, and the family pride and continuity involved in some chiefships. However, the exhibition failed to resolve issues about whether it intended primarily to showcase the artistic merit of marvelous images or to document and explain the history of paramount chieftaincy and associated regalia. As a result, the glimpses and hints remained unelaborated, much that needs explanation remained uninterpreted, and the promise of meaningful encounters with the chiefs through their collaborative involvement in the project remained unfulfilled.

The National Museum of African Art organized an impressive schedule of public programming to accompany the exhibition. Events ranged from gallery talks by Viditz-Ward, Chief Koury (a Mende paramount chief), and Dr. John Karefa Smart (first Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone), through performances of folktales from Sierra Leone, to a film and scholarly symposium that emphasized diaspora connections between Sierra Leone and the Sea Islands of South Carolina. The original photographs remain in Sierra Leone; this set of portraits will become a study collection at the National Museum of African Art. □

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RECLUSIVE REBELS
An Approach to the Sala Mpasu and Their Neighbors

Mesa College Art Gallery
San Diego, California
February 22–March 27, 1991

Reviewed by Rosalinde G. Wilcox

For this exhibition guest curator Elisabeth Cameron brought together twenty-eight fiber, wood, and metal objects that are rarely the focus of an entire show: Sala Mpasu masquerade forms. Of the twenty-five masks and headdresses on display, nineteen were from the Sala Mpasu of central Zaire. Peoples neighboring them—the Kongo-Dinga, Tshokwe, and Mbangani—produced the remaining five. Except for one northern Sala Mpasu example, the masks originated in the Tulume area. Nearly all of the Sala Mpasu objects had been collected in Zaire between 1930 and 1950, and all are now in American university and private collections.

Most of the Sala Mpasu works were arranged in three groups according to type along the wheat-colored walls of the single small gallery. This was the perfect muted background for these highly dramatic and expressive sculptures. The non-Sala Mpasu objects provided the accents and points of reference for issues of stylistic affinities, artistic influences, and historical relevance. Archival photographs and two archival photo murals illustrating the masking forms in performance context, a map locating Sala Mpasu country, and gallery wall notes guided the visitor through the exhibition, which was designed by Michael Golino.

Although there did not appear to be a definite starting point, I chose the Sala Mpasu warrior masks as the first group, since to me they are the most familiar and spectacular of all their works: large woven or knotted raffia-fiber headdresses, with the typical large protruding foreheads and bulbous noses, and exuberantly ornamented with feathers. One of the headdresses had been collected in 1932 by Joe Henderson, a missionary of the Four Square Gospel Mission. His photograph of a warrior wearing the same headdress was exhibited alongside, documenting and personalizing the events of performance and collection. Cameron's wall notes were informative, explaining several little-known details such as the replication of the warrior's cap on the headdresses as small knotted bumps. Worn during confrontations as head protection, an example of such a cap was on exhibit. These headdresses were also danced in male/female and husband/wife pairs when performed by the Idangani society. Female headdresses replicated women's hairstyles.

PHOTO: PABLO MASON

The Sala Mpasu were fiercely independent, resisting all foreign incursions, both African and European, for as long as possible. But, according to Cameron, changes occurred in Sala Mpasu forms despite their struggle for isolation and self-preservation. Cameron's discussion of the changes, and how and why they happened, was the strength of this exhibition. She credited changes in the warrior headdresses to repeated Tshokwe invasions. To make her point, a Tshokwe *tshikunza* headdress on display illustrated the appearance of the similar conical headdress on the exhibited Sala Mpasu raffia form as well as the introduction of pigments applied to the surfaces of the warrior headdresses. This group also included a warrior's knife and sheath.

Issues of reclusivity, change, response, and accommodation continued in the second group of masking forms, the *mukinka*. In creating the *mukinka*, the Sala Mpasu utilized metal in an unusual manner, since these masks appear to be fabricated of woven strips of copper applied over a wooden core. In terms of type and material, they were described as the result of Lunda domination.

In desperation, the Sala Mpasu sought assistance from the Lunda in staving off the Tshokwe. It was a moment of irony, since the Sala Mpasu had successfully resisted Lunda invasions for over 200 years. Lunda protection exacted a price. For the egalitarian and noncentralized Sala Mpasu, with no tradition of inherited property, the changes that occurred in their social structure resulted in an addition to the Sala Mpasu masquerade repertoire, the *mukinka*. Copper was (and still is) a material of elite status in Zaire. The prestigious copper-clad, triangular-shaped *mukinka* were worn by Sala Mpasu hereditary chiefs established on Lunda demand as tribute collectors in exchange for Lunda protection.

The *kasangu* constituted the third group. These are the carved wooden triangular forms, with double rows of teeth in a square mouth, and raffia or woven fiber spheres as a headdress. Often woven spheres are suspended from the mask's chin. Here Cameron gave the viewer the fullest implications of masking and masking associations to Sala Mpasu society. Not only were (and, one

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gathers, still are) masks and headdresses community objects that commemorate rites of passage, they were a source of income, achieved status, and most of all, a method by which Sala Mpasu male society was structured as a cohesive unit. Men acquired status by earning it. This process included apprenticing to a wealthy man, joining as many warrior associations as were affordable, and finally, earning the right to dance the mask. Since wealth and status were not inheritable, all goods of a deceased male member were distributed at his death to the members of his masking associations who performed at his funeral.

The independence of the Sala Mpasu, and their desire for isolation, was the theme of the exhibition. Cameron delivered as promised. In explanation of their preference for independence, she discusses the Sala Mpasu reputation for cannibalism, a reputation the Sala Mpasu may have promoted themselves. While it did not deter the Tshokwe, it kept out Lunda and Europeans for many years. Threats of cannibalism seem to have been used as a means of intimidating peoples. Arab slave traders, for example, told African slaves that Europeans wanted to free them in order to eat them, a tactic that frightened the slaves out of thoughts of escape. Perhaps the Sala Mpasu intimidated their neighbors in much the same way.

But I wonder if this discussion was necessary at all. Given the paucity of our knowledge about the Sala Mpasu, allegations of cannibalistic practices by them lessen the impact of the headdresses and detract from the associations that used them. I would have preferred more discussion about how the masks were made. Although we were offered a contrast in technique between a beaten copper Dinga mask and the Sala Mpasu masks that incorporated the metal in woven strips, the technology of both headdresses was unaddressed. All of the Sala Mpasu headdresses on exhibit demonstrated a highly unique treatment of materials, in which three-dimensional objects were produced with the methods one uses to fabricate textiles. Indeed, the warrior headdresses are woven or knotted three-dimensional raffia sculptures. Woven raffia spheres were part of the *kasangu* forms. The treatment of the copper in the *mukinka* closely resembles matting techniques. I also would have liked to see one of the Sala Mpasu fiber masks in the full round, so that all of its intricacies were visible.

Nevertheless, Cameron's exhibit was a treat. Assisted by Kathleen Stoughton, Gallery Director, and Barbara Blackmun of the Mesa College art history faculty, Cameron presented the viewer with a glimpse into the masquerade tradition of the Sala Mpasu and the changes that have occurred within that tradition. And the headdresses are spectacular. □

An exhibition catalogue by Elisabeth Cameron (28 pp., 10 b/w & 2 color photos, map, bibliography; $20 softcover) is forthcoming.

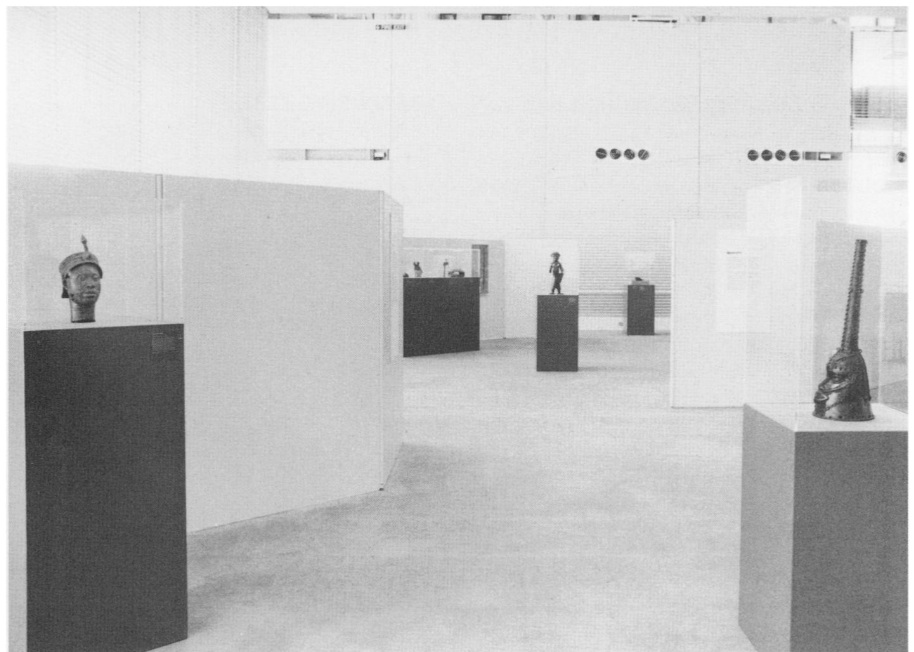

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE SAINSBURY CENTRE FOR VISUAL ARTS

MAN AND METAL IN ANCIENT NIGERIA

A Loan Exhibition from the British Museum

Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts
University of East Anglia
Norwich, Norfolk, England
February 12–April 7, 1991

Reviewed by Frank Willett

This exhibition was presented (and reviewed) at the Sainsbury Centre but was curated by Dr. Nigel Barley, curator of the West African collections at the Museum of Mankind, the Ethnography Department of the British Museum. It comprised some seventy objects in brass and bronze, mostly important ones, from the Museum's collection. The exhibition was conceived as a supplement to the Sainsbury Centre's own holding, seven Benin items which include a sensitively modeled roll-collar head and an ivory flywhisk handle in the form of a horseman.

Numerically the show reflected the composition of the British Museum's collection: there were four castings from Igbo Ukwu, one from Ife, forty-two from Benin (as well as a set of eight modern items from Benin showing the technique of lost-wax casting), one head from Udo, another from Owo, fourteen pieces from the Lower Niger Bronze Industries (four of these from the Andoni Creeks and three from the Apapa hoard), and, despite the title of the exhibition, a Tiv snuff-taker of no great antiquity. Some of the best-known pieces from the British Museum were included, such as the Queen Mother head, the cross-bearer from Benin, and the Lower Niger Huntsman figure, which has given its name to one of the major components of the Lower Niger Bronze Industries. There were also important pieces which are perhaps better known to specialists, such as the Apapa pectoral and the Andoni Creeks figure. A bonus, which seemed to have been added at a late stage, was an example of ore collected by Dr. Paul Craddock at the end of 1989, from Ishiagu in southeastern Nigeria. The label explained that "there is clear matching between the lead isotope content of ores from the Ishiagu mines and the Igbo Ukwu metalwork"—an exciting result confirming Craddock's earlier suggestion, made on the basis of the silver content of the metal and on the nature of the casting technology, that the metal had been locally prepared. It now seems likely that the casting of copper alloys at Igbo Ukwu was an independent invention.

The exhibition was organized around seven themes: Introduction; Igbo Ukwu and

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

BRONZE HUNTER AND DOG. LOWER NIGER BRONZE INDUSTRIES, SOUTHERN NIGERIA. 36.2cm. ALTHOUGH THIS PIECE WAS FOUND ON THE ANCESTRAL ALTARS OF THE PALACE IN BENIN CITY, ITS PRECISE ORIGIN REMAINS MYSTERIOUS.

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