

2002, Yam McClusky, Art from Africa



The Fetish and the Imagination of Europe: Sacred Medicines of the Kongo

The word "fetish" can be a gauntlet, thrown down with unsettling force. Europeans came to use the one word to cover a wide range of objects from all over the African continent.

Fetishes were everything from necklaces to sculptures valued by Africans for—in Western terms—their power of "enchantment," provocation of "superstitious dread," or capacity to be "animated by a spirit."¹ Outside Africa, fetish assignments have extended to complex issues of value. Karl Marx used the term to call attention to economic fixations. Sigmund Freud adopted it in describing sexual perversion. Recently, fetishism has been applied to Dutch still lifes as well as Hollywood cinema.

As a curator of African art, I receive at least one "fetish" call every other month. I keep track of them in a phone log that started as a way to contain my frustrations over the imaginary diabolical powers that African art inspires. The conversations follow a pattern: "I have a fetish from Africa. My grandfather/uncle collected it when he was working over there and he said it was supposed to give people headaches and my family doesn't want it around the house anymore. When can you come and get it?"

This basic statement is followed by long digressions about the errant uncle or adventuresome grandfather, but then we close in on what makes the owner uncomfortable about the fetish. One contained "slave tears." Another was "evil and nasty" and "too scary for anyone else to handle." Usually, the object comes from an unknown country, and the caller can only describe it as a standing statue. Along the way, my official capacity shifts from art museum curator to exorcist. Just as I am unsuited for this role, so is the sculpture whose job description has been typecast with one word. The exorcism should be redirected, against the process that created a blanket term for images of belief—against the fetishizing of African art.

It is we who have constructed the world of the fetish, not the original makers, priests or clients of such figures in Central Africa.

—John Mack, 1995² Pl. 77 (detail)

Standing as an anchor image for fetishes is a male figure holding his hands on his hips, most of his body covered with nails and blades (pl. 75). This sculpture is of the type held up as the epitome of the negative, violent model of vengeance that is still a baseline for fetishism. His body has been pounded with nails, poked with needles, splattered with blood, and incantations are uttered over him to provoke illness and disruption in someone's life. As this caricature steps aside, it is replaced with a figure whose personality and job description are shaped over the centuries of an evolving kingdom. First discovered over five hundred years ago, this kingdom tested European leaders' willingness to exchange goods and knowledge. Within the lifetime of one African king, however, trade took on new and terrible dimensions. The fetish was created as Europe closed off the exploration of African thought and chose instead the exploitation of its people.

Faith is as fragile as glass.

—King Mvemba Nzinga, who became Afonso I,
letter to King Joao III of Portugal, 1526³

A Portuguese explorer in 1483 was the first to notice water rushing from the Congo River into the Atlantic. Diogo Cão sailed into the mouth of the river but could not continue. He returned to Lisbon in 1484, taking with him four men from the Kongo kingdom. After meeting these ambassadors, the Portuguese king, Joao II, sent a fleet of three caravels to investigate their reports of a royal capital ruled by an African king. By December 1490, a group of priests, stonemasons, carpenters, and women set out with gifts and building materials to establish diplomacy and a settlement. The caravels arrived at the port city of Mpinda on March 29, 1491, to be greeted by the chief of the province, who was quickly baptized and renamed Don Manuel. Within days, the Portuguese began their walk inland to the capital city of Mbanza Kongo, perched atop a plateau in the Crystal Mountains. Escorts led them into the large city and through a maze of densely planted trees surrounding the approach to the king's quarters.

The expedition found King Nzinga Nkuwa seated on a raised wood throne with ivory inlay, while around him were assembled his queen, wives, nobles of the court, and chiefs of the provinces (fig. 39). Leopard and civet furs were draped around the king; his arms were laden with bracelets of copper; and his garments were woven of raffia. The leading Portuguese emissary approached him, knelt, and kissed his hand. King Nzinga responded by taking a handful of earth, pressing it against his heart and then against the Portuguese. Porters brought forth gifts from the king of Portugal—brocade, velvet, satin, silk and linen, silver and gold jewelry, trinkets, plate, and a flock of red pigeons. Kongo musicians played ivory trumpets, "producing a sound so melancholy that its like has never been heard."⁴ They repeated their song twelve times to honor the twelve generations of kings since the kingdom's beginnings. The next day, the king sent privately for the Portuguese to devise a plan for his baptism, which required the swift construction of a church. Two months later, before a huge gathering of onlookers, Nzinga took the baptismal name Joao I, and his son became Afonso I. A rush of other title holders followed their lead.

Pl. 75
Standing figure (*nkondi*)
Kongo, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Late 19th–early 20th century
Wood, iron, imported nails, fiber, beads, glass, feathers,
chalk
H. 80.5 cm (31¼ in.)
Gift of Katherine White and the Boeing Company,
81.17.836

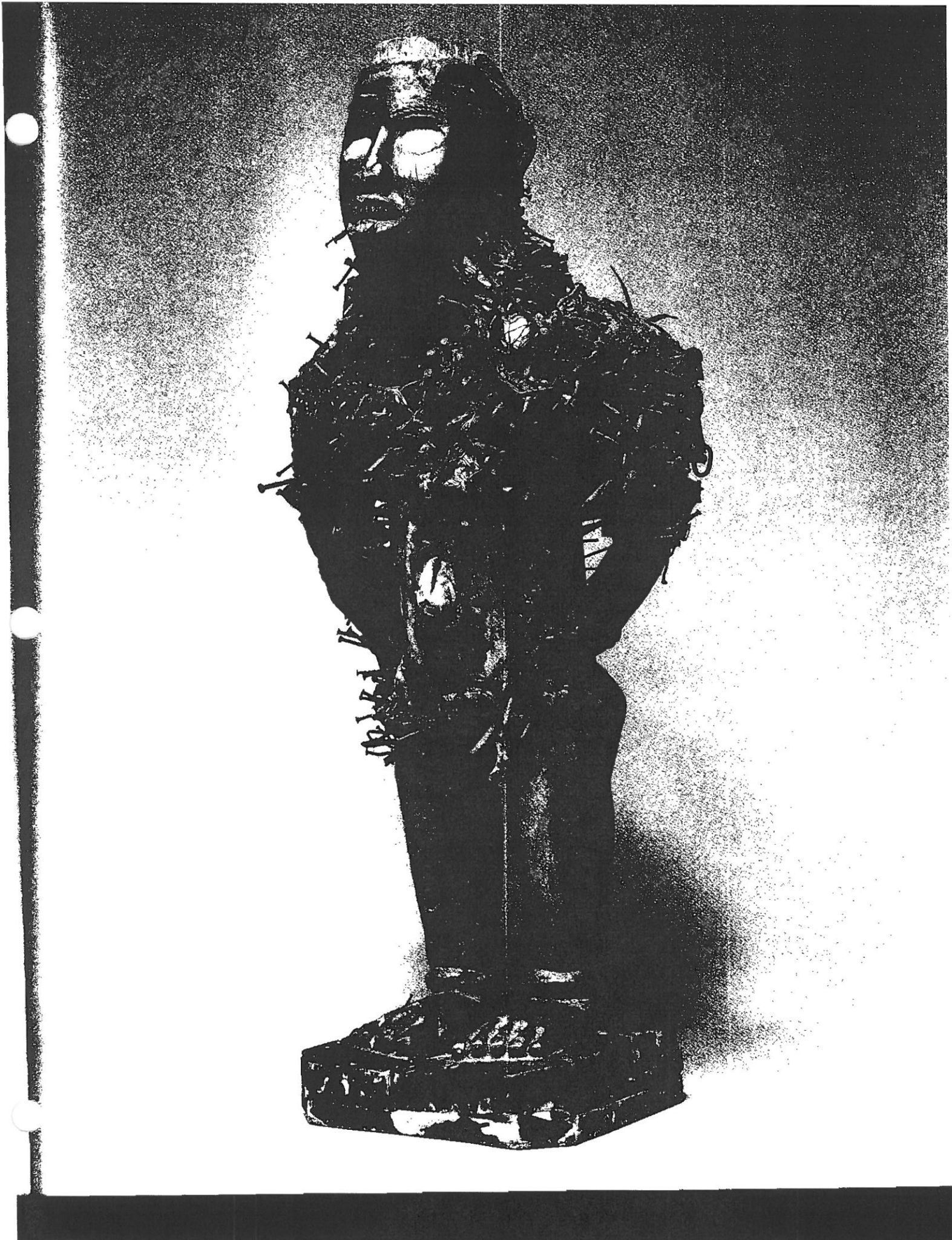
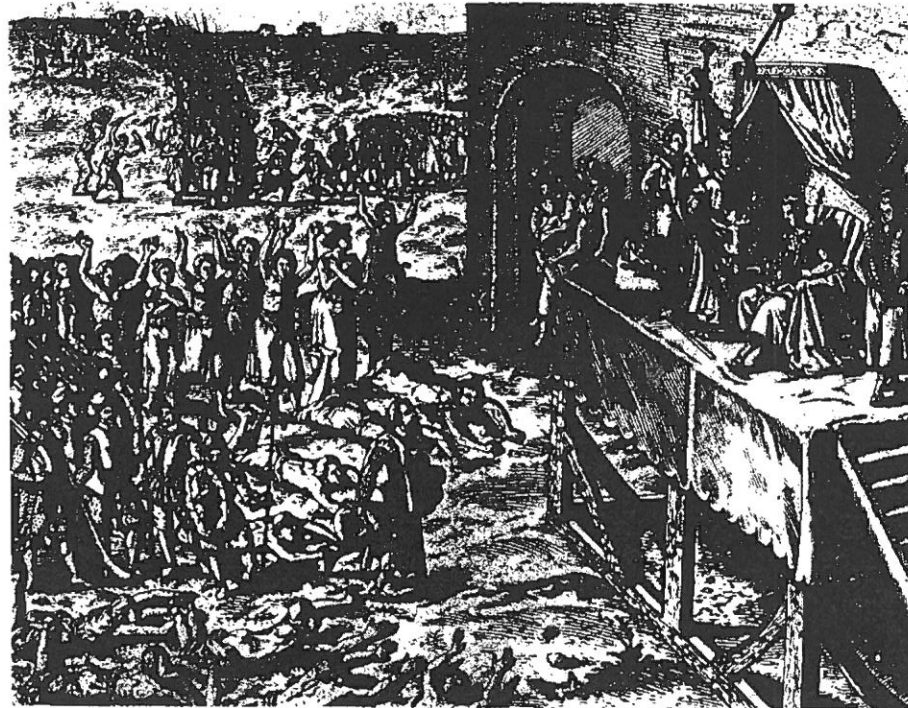


Fig. 39. The arrival of the Portuguese before the king of Kongo in 1491, from Filippo Pigafetta, *A Report of the Kingdom of Congo and of the Surrounding Countries...* (1591).



When members of the Portuguese expedition returned to Lisbon, young Kongo nobles went along to carry gifts of ivory and raffia cloth for the king. They also brought the news of a vast country with a distinguished government in place for nearly 150 years.⁵ The founder of the kingdom, Ntinu Lukeni, had gained renown as a judge whose fairness in establishing laws and dispensing justice formed a central identity for the people. Portuguese observers noted the presence of regional governors and ranks of civil servants convening in numerous courts within the palace. Most chroniclers also described a large open plaza known as the court of justice, where an enormous wild fig tree shaded the king as he heard disputes and reviewed his troops.

More Portuguese emissaries came to Mbanza Kongo in 1493 and 1504, bringing ample supplies of vestments, crosses, and religious books. Undoubtedly, one of the first to handle them was a member of the court who took extreme notice of all things Portuguese. His curiosity was a major force in an era of remarkable leadership. Mvemba Nzinga Afonso I assumed the throne after his father's death in 1506 and ruled until 1543. Not long after his coronation, he loaded a ship bound for Lisbon with gifts. He sent along his son and several nobles and requested that King Manuel put them in schools and dispatch more missionaries and technicians.

Indeed, Afonso I became famous for his commitment to Christianity and education—he studied theological texts with Portuguese priests and made Catholicism the state religion. Reports to the king of Portugal describe him as “the apostle of the Congo,” commending his skills in preaching, his exercise of justice, and his punishment of those who worshiped idols. Despite the fact that only his household firmly supported the move, he destroyed a “great house of the nkisi-fetishes” in Mbanza Kongo.⁶ A rendering of Afonso's destruction of the idols depicts a fire consuming a bundle of fantastic creatures with curling tails and fearsome faces (fig. 40).⁷

He presented metal crucifixes to all his chiefs and promoted the images of the saints to replace other charms. Evidence suggests that Afonso adopted Christian arts as another, possibly more direct, route to contact gods and ancestors. Afonso also learned Portuguese, thus launching the first correspondence between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. His vision for exchange between the countries was selective—he was pleased to supply copper, but didn't want outsiders to find his sources of silver and gold. He was glad to have Portuguese priests, books, medicines, and skilled laborers, but didn't want them to interfere with his laws or courts. When Portuguese priests and artisans did arrive, Afonso had them build mission schools and churches, and add new housing and tree-lined streets to the capital. He even improved the diet by introducing new plants provided by the Portuguese—guava, lemon, orange, maize, sugar cane, and manioc flourished in the fields.

When a Portuguese caravel was blown off course and landed in Brazil in 1500, world history shifted. The mines, coffee, and sugar plantations being established across the Atlantic required workers. Portuguese interest in the newly discovered African kingdom swiftly focused on the search for labor. Among the Kongo, people captured in warfare, criminals, and debtors were held as slaves but were entitled to earn or be granted freedom over a generation or two. African slaves of this type preceded a flood of others taken by the Portuguese. In 1512, a fateful

request was made by Portugal's King Manuel to King Afonso. Manuel sent five ships carrying more missionaries, technicians, soldiers, books, tools, and furniture than ever before. His ambassador outlined many forms of assistance that Portugal was ready to offer. In return, Manuel asked that Afonso fill the ships with ivory, copper, and slaves and allow his agent to gather regular payments of such commodities. Afonso agreed, and thereby opened the door of the slave trade. Fostered by members of Kongo nobility who sought to increase their own wealth and status, the slave trade started slowly but reached a torrent within one lifetime. By the 1530s, five thousand people a year were being shipped from a port on the Congo River. In 1600, the number reached fifteen thousand a year. Overall, the shipments from this region grew to account for forty percent of the ten million or more Africans forced across the Atlantic between 1500 and 1870.⁸

Afonso sent letters to two successive Portuguese kings, increasingly objecting to the slave trade. He received word that his son Henrique was consecrated as a bishop by Pope Leo X in 1518 (no African would attain such a rank in the Church



Fig. 40. "The King of the Congo, Afonso, Converted to Christianity, Orders Idols to Be Burnt," from Theodore de Bry, *Petits Voyages* (1603).

for another four centuries), but when Afonso tried to communicate with the pope about his disagreements with Portuguese practices, his emissaries bound for Rome were detained the minute they arrived in Lisbon.

One letter written in 1526 to King Joao III of Portugal expresses Afonso's distress over a trade that had grown into a massive force, disrupting his base of control and the entire population:

Each day the traders are kidnapping our people—children of this country, sons of our nobles and vassals, even people of our own family.... This corruption and depravity are so widespread that our land is entirely depopulated.... We need in this kingdom only priests and schoolteachers, and no merchandise, unless it is wine and flour for Mass.... It is our wish that this kingdom not be a place for the trade or transport of slaves.

Many of our subjects eagerly lust after Portuguese merchandise that your subjects have brought into our domains. To satisfy this inordinate appetite, they seize many of our black free subjects.... They sell them... after having taken these prisoners [to the coast] secretly or at night.... As soon as the captives are in the hands of the white men they are branded with a red-hot iron.⁹

Another letter singles out priests who became slave traders and set an example for others:

In this kingdom, faith is as fragile as glass because of the bad examples of men who come to teach here, because the lusts of the world and the lure of wealth have turned them away from the truth. Just as the Jews crucified the Son of God because of covetousness, my brother, so today He is again crucified.¹⁰

Afonso I's letters continued with appeals that turned personal in 1539 after ten of his relatives sent to Lisbon for a religious education disappeared en route. It later emerged that these relatives had indeed been turned over to a slave trader who shipped them to Brazil. Afonso's letter of December 1540 ended the communication from an extraordinary king, the only African author whose written record emerged from this region for four centuries. After his death in 1543, the Kongo kingdom maintained a base of power but faltered as the chiefs of the provinces built up their own wealth by conducting slave raids. As the chiefs bolstered their positions, the kingdom's centrality weakened, and titles became a sign of commercial abilities. British, French, and Dutch vessels had joined the Portuguese by 1600. The king's forces were defeated by the Portuguese in 1665, and the capital city of Mbanza Kongo was deserted.

Turning to the artistic record of this exchange, we learn that many pieces are missing from the picture. While reports of the baptism of Kongo leaders mention idols being burned, they do not describe them in any detail. As replacements, Portuguese priests of the fifteenth century brought images and practices to lead the Kongo into Christianity. With their conversion, the Kongo were supplied with crosses, crucifixes,

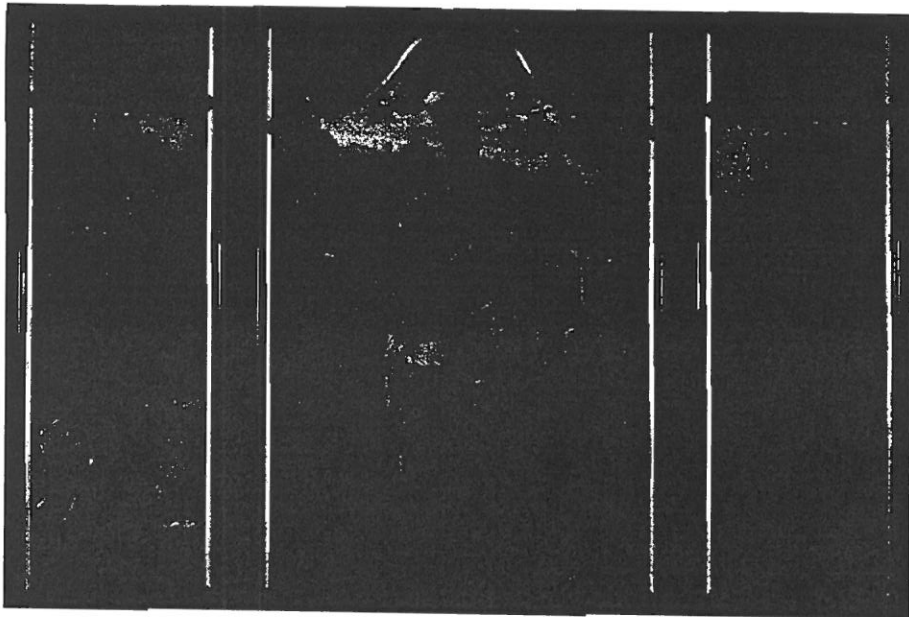


Fig. 41. Jan Sanders van Hemessen, *St. Sebastian*, central panel of triptych, ca. 1525–1566, oil on wood. © Musées de la Ville, Paris.

and religious books created for Portuguese Catholics. It is not known how much influence these Christian visions had on Kongo sculpture. The crucifixion was bound to be prominent—a man's figure pierced by stakes. Images like that of St. Sebastian, whose torso is riddled with arrows, were common (fig. 41): fifteenth-century Portuguese were heirs to "an impressive iconography of macabre bodily imagery which visualized mutilation as a means of achieving power or authority over life."¹¹ In services, the drinking of Christ's blood as food to sustain the soul of the world would have reinforced the notion of the divinity that can come from suffering. As "idols" were burned, was a new form born that reworked European icons? Was the "fetish" a combination of Kongo and Christian beliefs and images? The answer is obscured by the indiscriminate use of the term "fetish," and the rare occurrence of the Kongo word *nkisi*.

Some have a Lion's Tail, some a Bird's Feather, some a Pebble, a Bit of Rag, a Dog's Leg; or, in short, any Thing they fancy: and this they call their FITTISH, which Word not only signifies the Thing worshipped, but sometimes a Spell, Charm, or Inchantment.

—William Smith, 1744¹²

European descriptions of the seventeenth and eighteenth century often label African art as fetish, regardless of what form it takes. Derived from the Portuguese word *feitico*, meaning "witchcraft," and the Latin *fastidium*, "artificial," it became a standard catch-all phrase applied from coast to coast throughout Africa; the usage lingers in many dictionaries. Traders carried the term with them and resorted to it whenever they could not interpret the values placed on certain objects. In the course of trade, they perceived the African valuation of inanimate objects to be the basis of a false and flawed economy. Dutch traders in particular promoted the concept that African trade currency was tinged with irrationality, whereas coins were an appropriate symbolic

form derived from the abstract nature of God. The broad net cast for the fetish built up a European projection of Africa's inabilities and helped to justify exploitation and eventual colonization.

The term *nkisi* took two more centuries to be defined by Kongo sources, but it began appearing in European accounts in 1650. Evangelical Capuchins moved through parts of the provinces in the mid-1650s and burned as many figures as they could, often with expressions of outrage.¹³ One of the earliest references to a Kongo nail figure (*nkisi nkondi*) comes in 1668, when chronicler Olfert Dapper in *Description de l'Afrique* states that people of Loango drive nails into an "nkisi kikokoo," a wooden statue of a seated man. By 1700, another account mentions a fetish called *nkondi*, in the form of a man "one meter high" who detects thieves.

The first thing that comes their way . . . they exalt to the dignity
of a "Genius." —G. W. F. Hegel, 1837

In the influential text *The Philosophy of History*, G. W. F. Hegel reestablishes the notion of African objects as impulsive creations in discussing how Africans worship "the first thing that comes their way. This, taken quite indiscriminately, they exalt to the dignity of a 'Genius'; it may be an animal, a tree, a stone, or a wooden figure." He goes on to explain, "What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature."¹⁴ Throughout the nineteenth century, however, the term "fetish" was employed to challenge Europeans' confidence in their superior rationalism. It became a needle to probe vulnerable areas of confusion—how things are assigned values, and how knowledge influences belief. Karl Marx in *Capital* writes about commodity fetishism—when money becomes a form of exchange that no longer refers to the object as a product of men's hands and labor. He forecasts the time when "everything desirable, from sex to social status, could be transformed into commodities as fetishes-on-display that held the crowd enthralled even when possession was beyond their reach."¹⁵ Into the early twentieth century, Sigmund Freud and a host of psychiatrists and sociologists began to map the sexual fixations lurking behind the scenes of everyday European life. Clients were found to be dependent on articles of clothing (shoes, gloves, underwear) and parts of the body (hair, feet) for stimulation. The fetish was applied to a pathology deemed perverse, but common.

All of a sudden, without any transition, they saw appear on their
savage waterway European steamships of the nineteenth century.

—Camille Coquilhat, 1888¹⁶

While the use of the term was expanding to suit European needs, actual African objects called *nkisi* were about to come under siege. Ignoring the earlier discovery of a kingdom and its capital, and the ships making the Atlantic crossing over the centuries, the Congo region was recast in the nineteenth century as the most untouched portion of the Dark Continent, where people were "given over to cannibalism, human sacrifice, judgements by poison, fetishism, wars of plunder, slavery, polygamy, polyandry, and deprived of all unity in government, science, writing and medicine."¹⁷

In the name of another round of discovery and progress, the lower Congo region became home to what a recent investigative monograph deems "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of the human conscience."¹⁸ The period began in 1885 with the opening of the "Congo Free State," a creation of King Leopold of Belgium, whose groundwork was laid by the famed explorer Henry Morton Stanley. In an exercise of virtual rule, Leopold managed a state as large as Western Europe (sixty-six times the size of Belgium) without ever setting foot there.

With support from American and European leaders, Leopold authorized a regime to extract resources from the Congo. Ivory was the object of desire until 1890, when John Dunlop, an Irish inventor, devised the inflatable rubber tire, an invention that was to fuel the development of the automobile and launch the twentieth century. Rubber tapped from wild trees in the Congo was needed to supply the industrial world's newfound appetite, but it was only through arduous and unwelcome work that rubber was extracted. Agents for Leopold had to fill quotas and instituted extreme measures to force laborers into meeting them. Family members were held hostage until tapping was done. Troops shot everyone in sight if villages refused to supply the agents with enough rubber. When European overseers demanded proof that reluctant workers had been killed, people's hands were cut off and smoked as evidence. Porters were forced to carry sixty-five-pound loads along narrow paths over vast distances. Local revolts were suppressed by troops equipped with an American invention of 1870—the Maxim gun, a semiautomatic weapon that unleashed bullets in streams.

Horrified witnesses to the atrocities began appealing to King Leopold and major Western newspapers to account for the terrifying conditions. By 1904, the scandals were sending shock waves through Europe. Artists in Paris filled anarchist newspapers with political cartoons attacking missionaries and colonial forces. One cartoon depicts a man pounding a nail into a figure; the caption says he is nailing "to get his god's attention" (fig. 42).¹⁹ In response, Leopold operated a public relations campaign, founded on deception and bribes to editors and reporters, which kept much incriminating evidence hidden until 1906 when photographs began to appear.²⁰ By the time of Leopold's death in 1909, the record of this holocaust was mounting. From 1885 to 1920, in certain regions entire populations declined by fifty percent or more. By some estimates, at least ten million people died from mass murder, torture, and epidemics, which flourished among malnourished and traumatized people. In the later period of Belgian rule in the Congo, however, textbooks portrayed Leopold as a leader who did not deserve criticism, and spoke of "how the Belgians, by acts of heroism, managed to create this immense territory."²¹



DIEUX NÈGRES

ils sont obsédés comme des Saint Guirec dont notre catholique Bretagne est pourvue. Pour attirer son Dieu s'occupe de lui, il le lui fait sentir à sa façon.

Fig. 42. František Kupka, "Dieux nègres," *L'Assiette au beurre* (1904).

Thousands were burned in triumphal holocausts.

—Wyatt MacGaffey, 1993²²

In this atmosphere of conflict, missionaries were quite active. Protestants took evangelical ventures into the interior beginning in the 1870s and were followed by Belgian Catholics. Missions promised chiefs certain protections if they joined their faith. Christians welcomed the ceremonial burning of thousands of figures as a sign that paganism was failing and resistance to European powers was weakening. Kongo figures now in museums are among the few survivors of an artistic complex still in place at the turn of the century. An 1893 Dutch missionary bulletin is a rare account of how an object was collected for shipment: "This fetish was held in such high esteem that it might only be transported in a hammock, as the Blacks obstinately refused to give it up to Europeans except for a very high price. Later, French soldiers seized it and gave it to a traveler, who sold it to our Rotterdam friends."²³

Superstitious belief ... is hydra-headed in its virility.

—John H. Weeks, 1914

To most European observers, the Kongo nail figure was a fetish with a destructive mission. One chronicler of the Kongo, John H. Weeks, spent thirty years gathering his description of habits, customs, and religious beliefs. His first publication, *Among Congo Cannibals*, appeared in 1912 and was followed in 1914 by *Among the Primitive BaKongo*. His account of a nail fetish supports his contention that "a superstitious belief in charms, amulets, mascots, etc. is most difficult to eradicate: it is hydra-headed in its virility":

The most powerful and most feared of all the fetishes in the catalogue belongs to the medicine-man who has the mbanzangola fetish. . . . If a person desires to cause pain, disease, or death to another, he goes to a medicine man of this fetish order, and, having paid a fee, he drives in a nail or knife where he wants his enemy to feel the pain. A knife-stab in a vital part means a painful death to the man's enemy; a nail in the shoulder, elbow or knee means excruciating agony in one or another of those joints, and indicates that the man does not want to kill his enemy, but only wishes him to have rheumatism, abscesses, or such minor ailments. These fetish images are often stuck over with nails, knives and other sharp instruments. This is probably the only fetish image in connection with which there is no "white art" practiced—it is neither a protective fetish nor a curative one, but is always used to inflict pain.²⁴

Several hundred years of European speculation about the Kongo fetish came to an end just as Weeks's publication was being distributed. Beginning in 1912, Karl Edward Laman, a missionary of the Swedish Covenant Church, decided to take a radically different approach. Instead of writing about the Kongo, he sent them an invitation in the Kikongo language. Just by using Kikongo, Laman set himself apart from Belgian efforts to eliminate publishing in a language that bolstered Kongo identity. Any "intelligent person who knows how to read and write" was asked to use his "own manner of speaking and reasoning" to respond to a detailed questionnaire

about Kongo culture and institutions. Laman planned to print and translate this literature for missionaries and coming generations. Sixty-eight Kongo responded, all aligned with one Protestant mission or another. Ten went beyond the scope of the questionnaire and conducted their own field research. After seven years, Laman had in his hands 429 notebooks, a unique archive of Kongo culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Laman estimated that ten thousand manuscript pages returned with him to Sweden in 1919. He prepared a monograph using extracts from the notebooks, carefully identifying each author. Although this manuscript was never published, Swedish authors issued a series of four short monographs between 1953 and 1968 that turned "probably the most remarkable body of ethnography by Africans" into a text in which the African authors are "almost unrecognisable."²⁵

An nkisi is a chosen companion, in whom all people find confidence.

—Nsemi Isaki, 1910

Only in 1974 were the earlier Kongo writings finally made available, fifty-five years after being assembled. Two American scholars, John Janzen and Wyatt MacGaffey, published an anthology of the primary texts translated into English. At last Kongo words revealed notions far different from what European writers called a fetish. Nsemi Isaki, writing in 1910, explains *minkisi* (plural of *nkisi*), or sacred medicines, in these excerpts:

Nkisi is the name of the thing we use to help a man when he is sick and from which we obtain health; the name refers to leaves and medicines combined together. . . . An nkisi is also a chosen companion, in whom all people find confidence. It is a hiding place for people's souls, to keep and compose in order to preserve life (breath). But the help in healing is why people are especially grateful for minkisi. . . .

Minkisi differ in form and nature because the sufferings in the human body differ. The minkisi, in like manner, are as diverse and as many as the many, many illnesses in the land. . . . The ingredients put in the nkisi are categorized like the diseases in the body in order to help the nkisi in its work. . . . Nkisi Nkondi receives wedges, or "nails" made of vegetable matter if the person driving them has no iron ones. Lacking an iron wedge, a nail will be driven into the statue to "bind" it. It is believed that because of the wound that has injured Nkondi, he will become angry quickly and go "tie up" the person identified in the divination. . . . The medicines are the ingredients; their strength comes from each individually and from their being joined together. Each ingredient has an action upon man and the bringing together of these forces is what heals a person.²⁶

Kongo authors overturn the European vision of fetishes aligned with irrational superstition. They cite Ne Kongo as a cultural hero who carried the first healing medicine (*nkisi*) with him from heaven. He prepared the medicine in an earthenware vessel set on top of three stones or termite mounds. His actions founded the expertise that a healer (*nganga*) developed to dispense medicines. The healer's therapy

involved the proper mixtures of plants and elements, and the healing ingredients were then placed in the *nkisi*, which served as a container. The *nganga's* operation also incorporated theatrical dance and music. In the course of this ritual, a "war" or moral struggle would be declared against ancestors, spirits, and people whose powers cause misfortune such as illness, epidemics, or crop failure. Each *nkisi* required a special initiation—with words, songs, and gestures—before the owner could use it. Without that instruction, we cannot know the purpose of a specific *nkisi*. The distinctive type of figure with nails bears the general name of *nkondi*. Fu Kiau Bunseki offers a dual translation of *nkondi*, based on two classes of the Kikongo language. First, *nkondi* is a device, record keeper, or tool for dealing with *mambu*, or social issues. Second, it identifies someone who is a hunter, dealer, or spy.

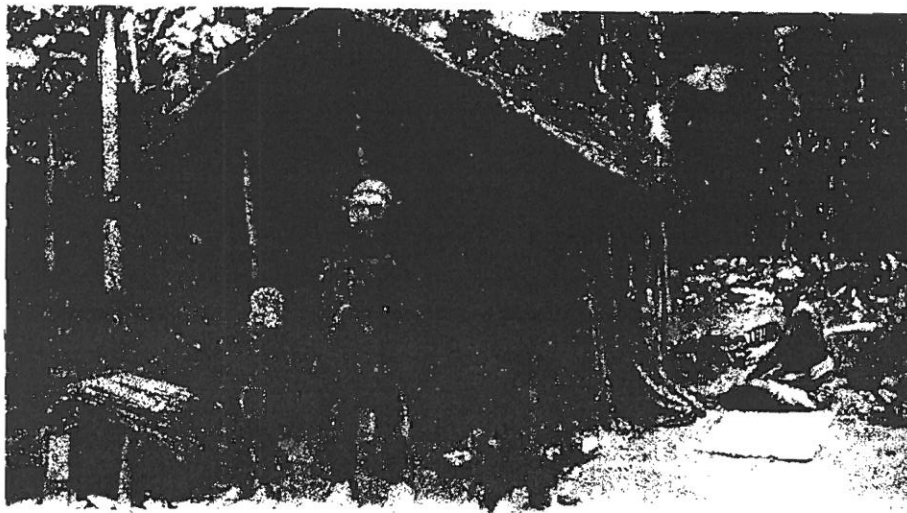
Equipped with Kongo words—some from the turn of the century and others from recent discussions, we can surround an *nkondi* with more of the original reading than ever before. But that reading is not definitive, because no one knows where, by whom, or why each figure was created. Definitions are adapted to suit social changes, and so "knowledge of them must be acquired piecemeal, often in the form of an extended invitation."²⁷ Very few of the sculptures taken out of the Congo were collected with the associated pattern of belief that surrounded them. For the Seattle Art Museum collection, there is no African record of ownership or documentation. A host of dealers in New York, Paris, London, and Los Angeles sold the figures to Katherine White in the 1960s and 1970s, before it was recognized that Kongo explanations for their use could be obtained.

Beneath the shadow of a tree . . . the court of judgement, *kiazala kia mfundusulu*, was arranged. —Fu Kiau Bunseki, 1980²⁸

Nkondi appear to have been kept apart in their own house, placed in a corner and approached only with the guidance of the *nganga* or priest/diviner. Seen in the very few pictures taken of *nkondi* in the Kongo region are small houses that form the setting for the *nkondi* (fig. 43). A visit would not be lightly undertaken, but was likely to be decreed at the conclusion of a trial, described as a central focus of Kongo life by Fu Kiau Bunseki (fig. 44):

Under this tree experts investigate the issue, its ramifications, and its effects on community life. The debate is carried on dialectically through diverse songs, slogans, proverbs, mottoes, questions and answers followed by comments. The accused [is] seated within the circle. Any community member is allowed to ask questions to the accused. The main goal of this procedural investigation is to understand social problems and conflicts through the accused and therefore [to] try to find a remedy to cure him as well as the entire community.²⁹

Such trials were considered a cornerstone of the kingdom and were full of arguments accented with proverbs and songs. The accused's experience was said to be a form of dying from the humiliation of being interrogated about a crime. After suffering through a trial, rebirth was granted the winner, who would be anointed with



Congo

Fétiches du Ka-Kongo

Mela, Bruxelles Série 24 No. 181



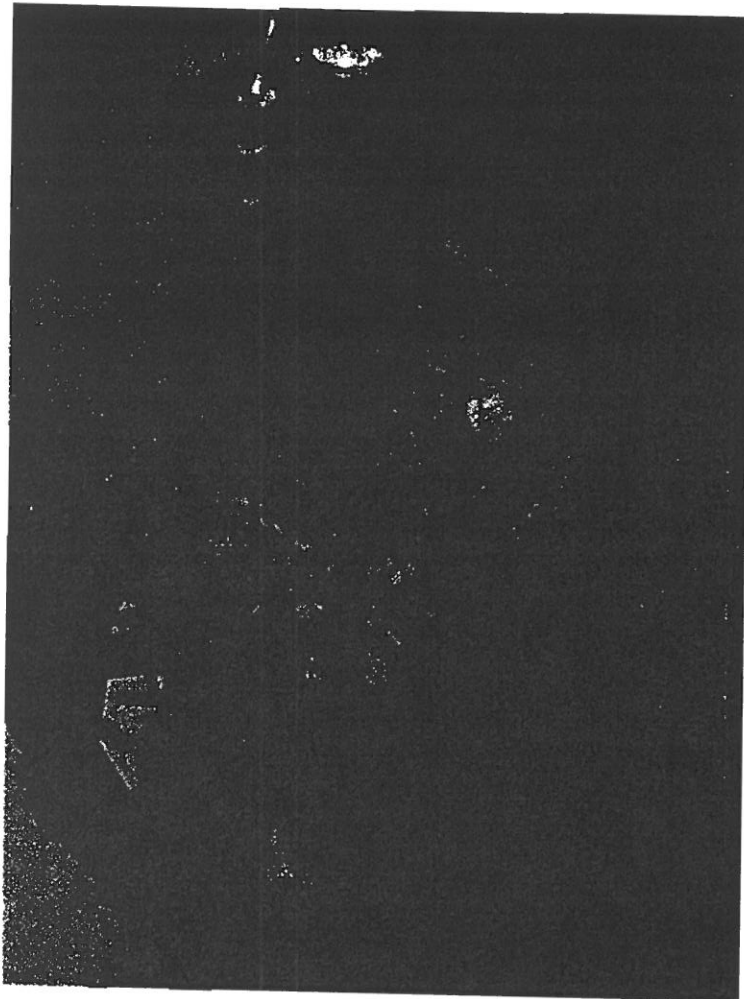
white clay to show exoneration. Opposing parties might agree to end their hostility or vow to settle a dispute. The argument (*mambu*) or tribunal was over. To finalize such cases, a visit to the *nkondi* was expected.

Pakalala: ready to attack and defend.

Pakalala is one of the *nkondi* figure's many postures. Meaning to stand with hands on hips, it is the stance of a wrestler prepared for whatever may come at him—ready to attack an enemy or defend a righteous person. In Kongo word associations, *paaka* means to cut meat into pieces, just as an *nkondi* takes apart subtle issues. *Paaka mambu* is the total summary and complete capturing of an issue, which the *nkondi* is about to deliver.

Fig. 43. "Fétiches du Ka-Kongo," postcard, 1902.

Fig. 44. Kongo assembly, within the town enclosure, 1882.



Pl. 75 (detail)

***Bibaaku*: demolish and divulge.**

Inserting nails or blades into the *nkondi* to tie down an agreement or lawsuit is called *bibaaku*. The act summons the figure to watch people adhere to legal covenants. It activates the figure to bring destruction to those who do not fulfill their end of a pact, oath, or treaty. Hundreds of people's trials and mistakes are held firm on this figure's body as a reminder of personal and specific needs of community members (detail, pl. 75). It is the *nkondi*'s duty to fix the client's intentions to remain true to his words of agreement, but also to attack if the agreement is not respected. The *nganga* assists in this process by binding a bit of the client to the nail or blade. Some are asked to lick the nail, adding their saliva as a signature to their agreement. Others might tie on a cloth or string to remind the nail what to do. As the nails accumulate, they become a document covered with intricate details of the many people who have made pacts and decisions in the *nkondi*'s presence. The overall effect was said to produce astonishment in beholders, convincing them of an extraordinarily capable force.³⁰

***Nganga*: priest/diviner.**

Keeping track of the precise history of each insertion was the duty of the *nganga* (plural = *banganga*), described as a kind of traffic policeman for the desires and tensions in the lives of his clients. His appearance was often as distinctive as the *nkisi* he worked with. Colored marks and stripes of chalk covered parts of his body, and circles of white chalk surrounded his eyes. Most *minkisi* bear traces of chalk derived from white porcelain clay found under the water or in streambeds, where the dead reside and imbue the substance with their presence. The whiteness applied to the *nganga* may refer to his clairvoyance in contacting this world. John Weeks writes that in place of normal clothes "his dress consists of the softened skins of wild animals, either whole or in strips, feathers of birds, dried fibres and leaves, ornaments of leopard, crocodile or rat's teeth, small tinkling bells, rattling seedpods, and anything else that is unusual and wearable."³¹ *Nganga* dressed to impress clients as a kind of "show business" that set the stage for a complex of actions designed to assist individuals and public authorities.³² Many specialized in particular treatments: some were adept at discovering wrongdoers; others were skilled in resolving conflicts between lineages; and many were curers who prescribed medicines and ritual orders designed to counter any illness. Taking a massage and steam baths, drinking medicine, and hearing confessions were among the measures an *nganga* might recommend for his clients. Some *nganga* were known to wear hats made of red parrot feathers, which may

once have rested atop the head of this *nkondi* (pl. 75) with a blaze of jagged color.

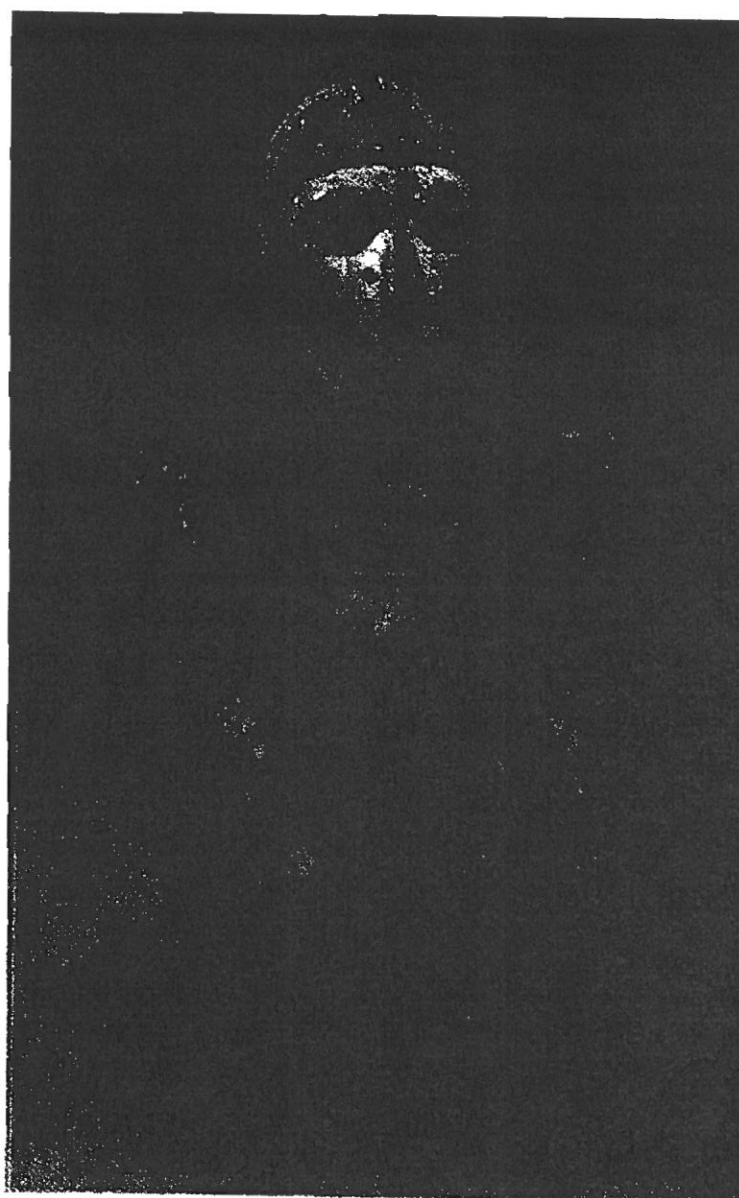
Mooyo: the belly/life.

The belly of this *nkondi* has been emptied; only a scrap of cloth is left as a hint of what originally covered the navel. A pack of medicines composed by the *nganga* would have filled this hole and been sealed in place with resin, and then a mirror placed in the center. Such medicines gave the figure life, or as Robert Farris Thompson says, a vitality "like a live radio with a working antenna." Without the medicines, the figure has lost its compass and is unable to act. *Minkisi* were portable shrines for the souls or spirits they referred to.

Four other figures illustrate how the mooyo could be configured. The first is seated, with medicines projecting from his navel and the shoulders of his jacket (pl. 76). His gun, uniform, and pith helmet may signal the presence of a European soldier. Sealed behind glass are a host of ingredients that float in a foggy enclosure just out of view. A standing figure whose arms are absorbed into a swollen belly clearly displays his role as a container for medicines—the head twists off (pl. 77). Sitting cross-legged, another holds his hand to his chin in a pose suggesting a person of reflection, lost in thought about how to guide others with his mind (pl. 78). The Kongo phrase "we leave this matter in your lap" refers to the person who is seen listening and thinking on behalf of others.³³ Holding his belly with his left hand and a cane of authority with his right, another Kongo man stands attentively (pl. 79). Medicines coat his face and helmet, but not his body.

Dikenga: the turning.

Fu Kiau Bunseki in 1969 first wrote about underlying principles of Kongo art. He clarified a notion that had flourished beneath the surface, beyond European understanding, for more than four hundred years: "The sign of the cross was not introduced into this country and into the minds of its people by foreigners. The cross was known to the Kongo before the arrival of Europeans, and corresponds to the understanding in their minds of their relationship to their world."³⁴ Bunseki introduced the notion of the *dikenga*, a sign or cosmogram for seeing the progress of a man's soul as akin to the path of the sun (fig. 45). Four moments of the sun are equated with four end points of a cross in a circle. He names the four moments: (1) *kala*, rising, beginning, birth, or regrowth; (2) *tukula*, ascendancy, maturity, responsibility; (3) *luvemba*, setting,



Pl. 76
Seated officer
Kongo, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Late 19th-early 20th century
Wood, mirror, glass, chalk, camwood powder, clay, labels
H. 24.2 cm (9½ in.)
Gift of Katherine White and the Boeing Company,
81.17.835



Pl. 77
Standing figure
Kongo, Democratic Republic of the Congo
20th century
Wood, glass, metal
H. 30.1 cm (11¾ in.)
Gift of Katherine White and the Boeing Company,
81.17.841



Pl. 78

Seated man

Kongo, Democratic Republic of the Congo

20th century

Wood

H. 13.8 cm (5½ in.)

W. 6.0 cm (2¼ in.)

Nasli and Alice Heermaneck Collection, 68.54

Pl. 79

Standing figure

Kongo, Democratic Republic of the Congo

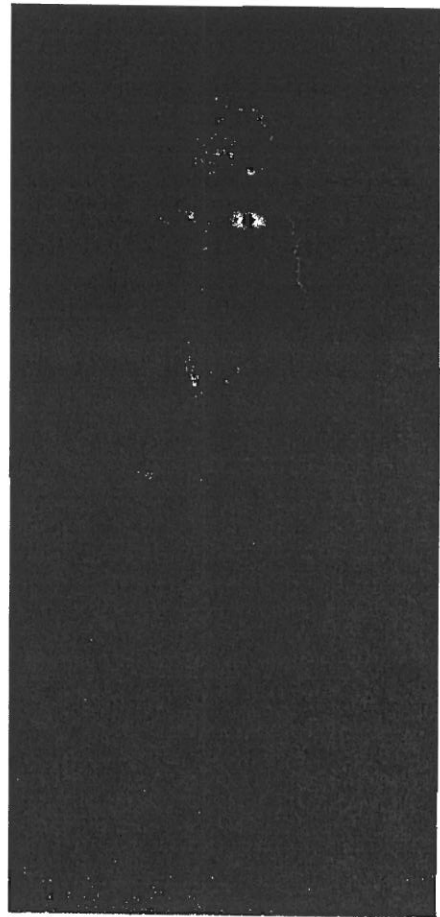
20th century

Wood

H. 19.7 cm (7¾ in.)

Gift of Katherine White and the Boeing Company,

81.17.839



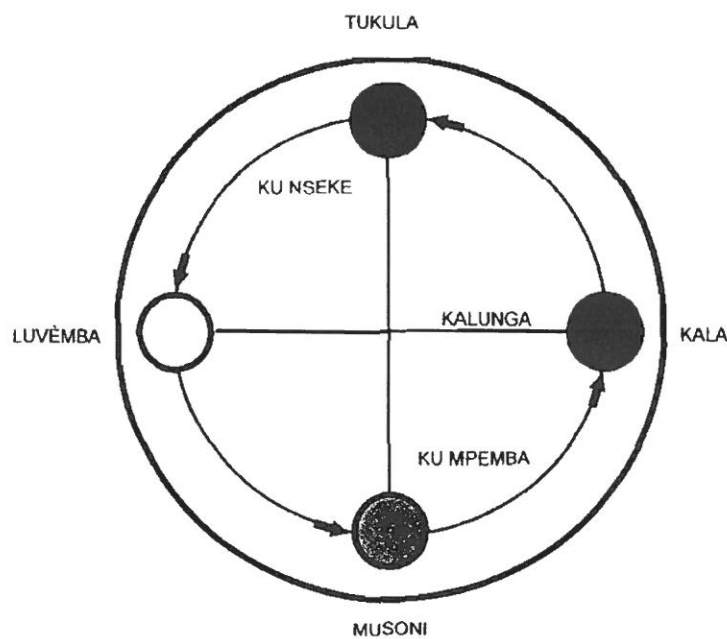


Fig. 45. Diagram of *dikenga*, four moments of the sun, after the writing of Fu Kiau Bunseki.

handing on, death, transformation; and (4) *musoni*, midnight, existence in the other world, eventual rebirth.³⁵ All souls are constantly cycling through these four stages, just as each day goes through its stages. Early morning mists are the dying embers of the cooking fires of the dead, who pass away just before the dawn of the living. The *dikenga* sign can also be read as a map: the world of the living and dead meet in the middle horizontal line called *kalunga*.

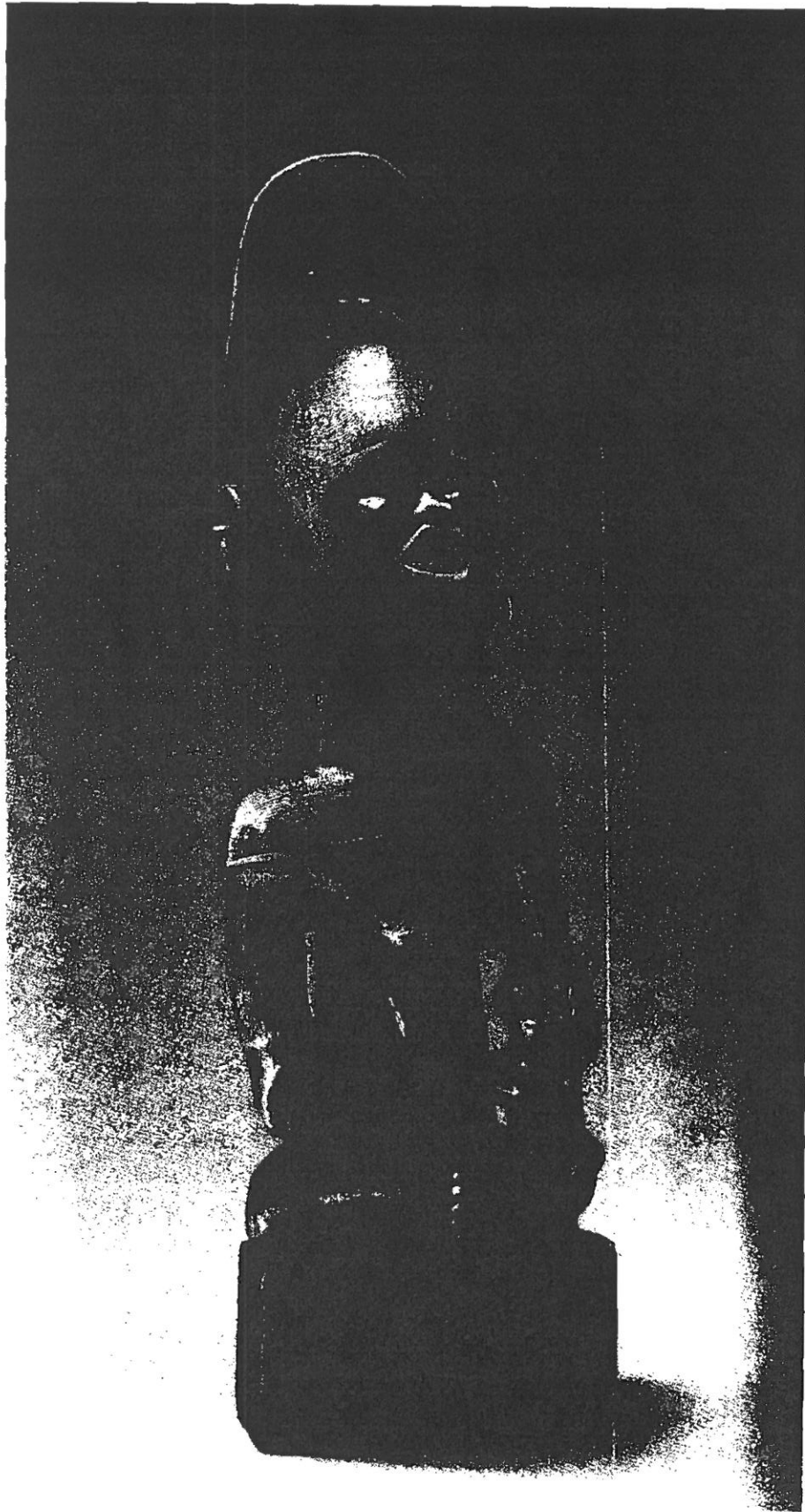
Turning and circling are found in a woman with child (pl. 80). She sits on an honorary platform incised with pinwheel images that rotate. Her legs form a circle to suggest the cycle of one's life and the revolution of the day from one world to the next.

A *dikenga* sign is a potent document. An *nkondi* figure was likely to witness its impact as a cross was marked on the ground to create a ritual space for oath taking. "The person taking the oath stands upon the cross, situating himself between life and death, and invokes the judgement of God and the dead upon himself."³⁶ In other circumstances, the *dikenga* declared abilities to lead: "To stand upon this sign meant that a person was fully capable of governing people, that he knew the nature of the world, that he had mastered the meaning of life and death."³⁷

***Kalunga*: ocean, door, and wall between two worlds.**

The *nkondi*'s eyes shine, reflecting light from mirrors placed above them. Mirrors, in their shimmering qualities, are reminders of *kalunga*, the shining water that forms a thin barrier between the living and dead. That barrier is crossed by souls and the sun each day. To move into the world below is to enter a time of regeneration, when one's soul can purge itself of the impurities acquired in life and emerge ready to be born into the next existence, washed clean. Looking at the water, or into the *nkondi*'s eyes, we glimpse a miraculous world waiting to welcome the tired soul (detail, pl. 75).

Out of humiliation can stem grandeur. —Fu Kiau Bunseki³⁸



Pl. 80

Mother and child

Yombe, Kongo, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Late 19th-early 20th century

Wood, glass, metal

H. 9.9 cm (3 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.)

Gift of Katherine White and the Boeing Company.

81.17.838

Most Kongo sculpture was collected at the turn of the twentieth century, when the prospects for understanding by outsiders were bleak. One European observer sets the tone of the time: "Kongos have no religion or system of worship; vague superstition takes the place of the former; and the arrangement of charms of the latter. There is no idolatry or attempt to communicate with a Divine Being."³⁹ The European writers were partly blinded by the need, in the colonial mind, to step in and establish religion where there was none. Another reason is described by Wyatt MacGaffey, scholar of the Kongo, who points out that writers then thought of culture as a collection of traits, not as a system of thought. They were not encouraged or inclined toward abstract thinking themselves, so they deemed the native populations incapable of it.⁴⁰ The

blinders were so firmly fixed that the Kongo explanations of their own ways of composing the world went unseen. Meanwhile, for centuries, the Kongo maintained a system of *minkisi*, a religion of medicines, common principles of moral conduct, and an orientation to the relations between the land of the dead and the houses of the living.

The large thunder of people's icons.

—Robert Farris Thompson, 1992⁴¹

Kongo-derived sights and sounds have been an inspiration for African American creativity for centuries. Listen to the samba in Brazil, watch the rumba in Cuba, or tune into the jazz of North America and you are immersed in art forms with Kikongo names and elements. Travel around Cuba, where "underground Kongo practices wired the island," and go to Havana, known as Kuna Mbanza, "to town over there." As cosmograms are drawn in chalk on the earth, priests restate the Kongo *dikenga*, a site where "spirits seat themselves on the center of the sign as the source of firmness."⁴² In Haiti, watch for *paquets congo*, bundles containing references to visual codes, puns, and spirits from the Kongo. Attend a ceremony in Rio de Janeiro and you may see Kongo influences mix with Roman Catholic notions of the Latin cross. Examine an Umbanda altar in Uruguay or Brazil for Kongo traces in the mixture of images. Peer inside a large three-legged iron cooking pot in Cuba, Miami, or New York—the assembled ingredients can constitute an *nkisi* much as they would in Kinshasa (fig. 46).

Like a tornado hidden in an egg.

—Fu Kiau Bunseki, 1978

A walk through African American communities reveals one of the most enduring points of connection to a Kongo aesthetic. Yards and graves display an organic link in a host of choices people make. Considered an opening remark to the person passing by, a yard can itself be transformed into an *nkisi* governed by a concern for protection and completion of the soul's journey. The circles, crosses, diamonds, and spirals of



Fig. 46. *Futu nkisi mbuki* (bundle of medicine for a healer), Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1972.

the cosmogram are reconfigured in pinwheels, tires, things that roll on and on. Bottles hanging from trees flash in the sun, luring provocateurs inside to be captured. Tinfoil, mirrors, and lightbulbs reflect light, hinting at the charge of the spirits who wait beneath the shiny surface of the water's edge. Commonplace objects grow empowered by associations. A snail shell placed in the yard or on the grave is a punning reminder that immortality is in evidence—the Kikongo word for snail shell, *zinga*, also means “to live long.” Outward simplicity but inner complexity became a hallmark of African American spiritual expression by necessity, but also finds inspiration in Kongo precedents. Bunseki recounts that the first *nkisi* given to Man was Funza, incarnated in unusual twisted root formations. “When you see a twisted root within a charm you know, like a tornado hidden in an egg, that this *nkisi* is very, very strong—you cannot touch it, only *nganga* can touch it.”⁴³ African American healers were known as “root persons,” respected for their recipes of earth, feathers, forest woods, and many other things, but most significant was a root known as High John the Conqueror.

Let me be the bad guy. —David Hammons, 1986

Kongo impulses have been taken into the streets of New York by the artist David Hammons, whose work conjures many obsessions of the art world. After moving to New York, Hammons found that “everybody was just groveling and Tomming; anything to be in the room with somebody with some money. There were no bad guys here, so I said, Let me be the bad guy, or attempt to be a bad guy, or play with the bad areas and see what happens.”⁴⁴ He often worked outside galleries, turning his attention to vacant lots in Harlem. Empty Night Train and Thunderbird bottles started appearing on the tips of branches, and metal rings were seen adorning trees like necklaces. Finding tornadoes of meaning in the dirt and discards of life, he created installations using human hair collected from local barber-shop floors, chicken wings found on the street, and bottle caps salvaged from barrooms (fig. 47). On a landfill in lower Manhattan, he constructed *Delta Spirit* out of discarded sheets of metal and surrounded it with an enlarged yard show of doll shoes, bottle caps, feathers, cowbells, wind chimes, and old wheels. The installation was situated by the Hudson River, near the edge of the water's shiny surface, and was a gathering place until it mysteriously disappeared in a fire. In a move made famous by another artist, he collected enormous elephant droppings from the circus and offered the resulting elephant dung sculptures for sale on the streets. Then he sold snowballs. Like the Kongo king who used dirt to signify greeting, David Hammons finds significance in elements that seem simply made but carry complex associations.

Colonel Frank called this one fetish no. 3. —Renée Stout, 1989⁴⁵

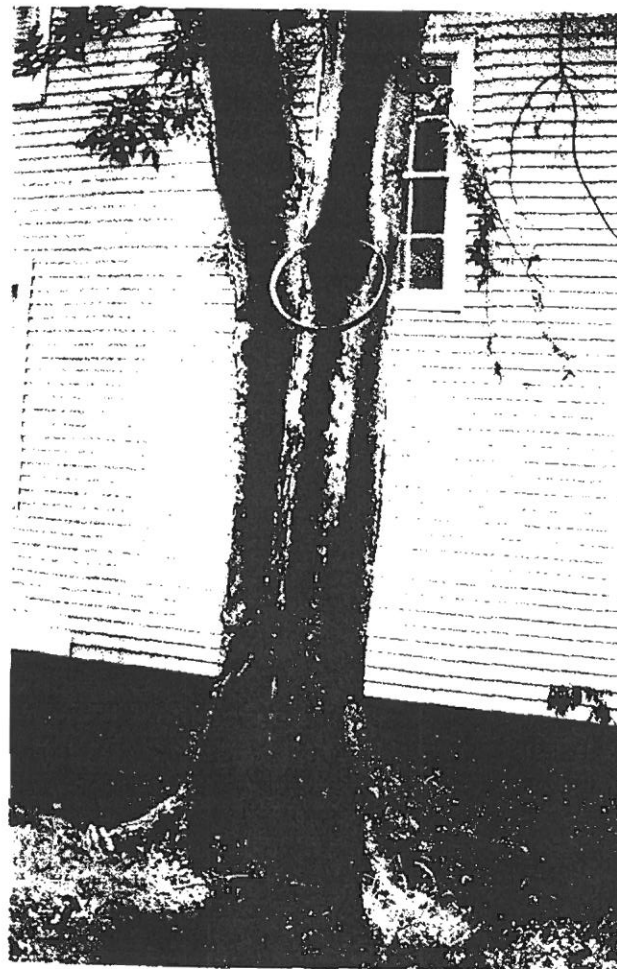


Fig. 47. David Hammons, *Money Tree*, 1992, gelatin silver print, H. 41.9 cm (16½ in.). Gift of Greg Kucera and Larry Yocom, Seattle Art Museum, 97.77.



Fig. 48. Renée Stout, *Fetish no. 3*, 1989, mixed media, H. 24.1 cm (9½ in.). Private collection. © 2001 Renée Stout.

Fig. 49. Page from Renée Stout's notebook for *Fetish no. 3*, 1989, ink on paper, H. 28 cm (11 in.). Collection of the artist. © 2001 Renée Stout.

When Renée Stout was ten years old, she saw her first *nkondi* at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. Kongo imagery and medicines led the artist to create a sequence of sculptures and installations that immerse the viewer in *minkisi* placed in an American context. Her studies guide her work, but she gains admiration for reclaiming African aesthetics and doubling their power through invented realities and personal experiences. In *Fetish no. 3*, Stout takes the image of a doll/child, inspired by her work with three-year-old children (fig. 48). "In working with them for the past four years I've seen a lot of innocence, which, to me, seems to ward off evil."⁴⁶ Her dolls imply a role reversal, as they deviate far from the convention of miniature people to play with, and instead project strong personalities with layers of Kongoized identity. In a posture much like that of the woman and child seen in pl. 80, the figure in *Fetish no. 3* sits with her legs in a circle. Stout attaches bundles of her own hair to the head and covers the features with kaolin chalk. She is also known to place inside her works grave dirt, powdered High John the Conqueror root, and other ingredients to ensure that the figure is imbued with the presence of her ancestors and her own being. In another role reversal, Stout plays on the old version of the fetish as a memento brought back from trips to exotic lands by the invented Colonel Frank. In a report about his observations, the fetish is described according to old ethnographic style,



RENEE
STOUT
1989

"FETISH NO. 3"

(1989)

9 1/2 x 7 x 6 1/2

MIXED MEDIA

COLONEL FRANK CALLED THIS ONE FETISH NO. 3 SINCE IT WAS THE THIRD FETISH HE'D RECEIVED FROM THE PEOPLE OF IBN ISLAND. THEY TOLD HIM THAT IT WAS VERY EFFECTIVE IN WARDING OFF EVIL BECAUSE OF THE FORM IT TOOK. THEY SAID THAT BABIES WERE BORN TOTALLY INNOCENT. THEREFORE THEY WERE ABOVE EVIL THOUGHTS AND DEEDS. ON IBN ISLAND, ANY HOUSEHOLD THAT DID NOT HAVE A BABY UNDER TWO YEARS OF AGE HAD A FETISH LIKE THIS ONE TO GUARD THE HOME AND ITS INHABITANTS FROM EVIL AND CORRUPTION. ONCE A BABY REACHED THE AGE OF TWO YEARS HE GOT HIS FIRST HAIRCUT. THE HAIR WAS THEN GATHERED UP AND TAKEN TO THE ISLAND WITCHDOCTOR WHO WOULD CREATE LITTLE HAIR BALLS BY ROLLING A SMALL AMOUNT OF HAIR BETWEEN HIS TWO PALMS. HIS WIFE WOULD THEN CREATE A BABY'S FORM OUT OF CLAY COVERED WITH CLOTH AND ATTACH THESE BALLS OF HAIR TO THE HEAD. THE SPIRIT OF THE BABY'S YOUTH AND INNOCENCE WOULD BE BESTOWED UPON THE FETISH THROUGH THE HAIR BALLS AND EVEN THOUGH THE CHILD WOULD GROW UP THE HOUSE WOULD STILL BE PROTECTED

3

full of imaginative notions (fig. 49). The work echoes the fetish phone calls to museums about unnerving curiosities brought back by adventuresome uncles.

Fetishism cycles on, evolving from a word invented by Europeans to disparage African art, to a label applied to Western sexual and economic fixations, to a pun in American art. It is employed as well by African artists who take up the gauntlet of the term. Trigo Piula, in a painting of 1988 entitled *Ta Tele*, puts a Kongo figure on display before an African audience. In the belly, instead of medicine, he places a television screen, ready to receive images seen behind the figure. A soccer match, a kissing couple, a plate filled with food, a beer commercial, and a view of Earth from space are prepared for broadcast. A small symbol planted in the back of each audience member's head indicates what the person desires—a car, a heart, shoes, a meal, clothes, a bottle. As Karl Marx predicted, the fetish for commodities is in full evidence, as advertising promotes the belief that consumer goods can change one's life in important ways.

Mweze Ngangura's film *Pièces d'identité*, released in 1998, considers the value accorded Kongo art in a recent context. It follows the story of a modern-day Kongo king who sends his daughter to Belgium to study medicine and then loses contact with her. Concerned for her safety, he flies to Brussels alone, wearing elements of royal regalia with his dark suit. Observers question why he is wearing such "fetishes." (The regalia happens to be Kuba, but this is a fictional feature film.) When street hustlers steal all his money, the king is tricked into pawning his regalia. A disreputable art dealer then takes control of the "fetishes." Whether the Kongo king can survive on the streets of Brussels without his regalia becomes a test of its power. Does a faith in sacred artistry offer him strength or cripple him in a foreign setting?

Looking back to 1491, we return to this question. The Kongo king Nzinga took a handful of earth and pressed it against his heart to greet a Portuguese visitor. This gesture, interpreted by Fu Kiau Bunseki as signaling his faith in the earth as the ultimate source of medicine, was the first of many offered over the next five hundred years. Kongo art and medicines together provoke viewers to determine whether their faith in creative exchange is "as fragile as glass" or as enduring as earth.

Notes

1. Definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:
 - a. Originally, any of the objects used by the Negroes of the Guinea coast and the neighboring regions as amulets or means of enchantment, or regarded by them with superstitious dread.
 - b. By writers of anthropology, used in a wider sense: An inanimate object worshipped by primitive peoples on account of its supposed magical powers, or as being animated by a spirit.
2. John Mack, "Fetish? Magic Figures in Central Africa," in *Fetishism: Visualizing Power and Desire*, ed. Anthony Shelton (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1995), 65.
3. From a letter cited in Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 13.
4. Suzanne Preston Blier, *Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form* (London: Lawrence King, 1998), 211.
5. The word "kongo" signifies a socially organized space and has been applied to the people of the region of the Lower Congo River, from the Atlantic coast of Central Africa and extending inland to the current Kinshasa. In the twentieth century, the approximately six million Kongo people were distributed among the Republic of the Congo (formerly French Congo), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Belgian Congo, then Zaire), and Angola. For clarification of who is and was Kongo, see Wyatt MacGaffey, "Kongo Identity 1483-1993," *Nations, Identities, Cultures*, ed. V.Y. Mudimbe (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 45-58.
6. Anne Hilton, *The Kingdom of the Kongo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 62.
7. Theodore de Bry, *Petits Voyages* (1598).
8. Statistics about the numbers of the slave trade are continually being reconsidered.
9. Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 13.
10. *Ibid.*, 14.
11. Anthony Shelton, "The Chameleon Body: Power, Mutilation and Sexuality," in *Fetishism*, 22.
12. William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea* (London: Nourse, 1944).
13. Anne Hilton, *The Kingdom of the Kongo*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 195.
14. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (1899; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 99.
15. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1 (1887; reprint, New York: Vintage, 1977).
16. Captain Camille Coquilhat (deputy to Henry Stanley), *Sur le haut Congo* (Paris: J. Lebegue, 1888), 483.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*.
19. The caption reads: "Dieux nègres: ils sont obéissants comme des Saint-Guirec dont notre catholique Bretagne est pourvue. Pour que son Dieu s'occupe de lui, il le lui fait sentir à sa façon."
20. One of the most vehement American writers drawing attention to the atrocities of this time was Mark Twain. In *King Leopold's Soliloquy* (1905; reprint, New York: International Publishers, 1961), he re-creates an imaginary rant by King Leopold against the Kodak camera: "The kodak has been a sole calamity to us. The most powerful enemy indeed. . . . I was looked up to as the benefactor of a down-trodden and friendless people. Then all of a sudden came the crash! That is to say, the incorruptible kodak—and all the harmony went to hell!" 68.
21. Quoted from 1959 textbook, Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 299.
22. Wyatt MacGaffey, "The Eyes of Understanding: Kongo Minkisi," in *Astonishment and Power* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 33.
23. *Nederlandsche Zendingsvereeniging Zendingsblaadje*, no. 234 (November 6, 1893), cited in *Astonishment and Power*, 35.
24. John H. Weeks, *Among the Primitive BaKongo* (London: Seeley, Service and Co., 1914), 225-26.
25. *Art and Healing of the Bakongo Commented by Themselves: Minkisi from the Laman Collection*, trans. and ed. Wyatt MacGaffey (Stockholm: Folkens Museum, 1991).
26. John M. Janzen and Wyatt MacGaffey, *An Anthology of Kongo Religion: Primary Texts from Lower Zaire*, University of Kansas Publications in Anthropology, no. 5 (1974), 35-38.
27. Wyatt MacGaffey, "Complexity, Astonishment and Power: The Visual Vocabulary of Kongo Minkisi," *Journal of African Studies* 14, no. 2 (January 1988), 188.
28. Fu Kiau Bunseki, *African Book without Name* (privately printed, 1980), 41.
29. *Ibid.*
30. MacGaffey, "The Eyes of Understanding."
31. Weeks, *Among the Primitive BaKongo*, 217.
32. MacGaffey, "The Eyes of Understanding," 52.
33. For a discussion of gestures and poses as found in classic Kongo sculpture, see Robert Farris Thompson, *Four Moments of the Sun* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1981).
34. Quoted in Janzen and MacGaffey, *Anthology of Kongo Religion*, 34.
35. Fu Kiau Bunseki, 1969, quoted in Janzen and MacGaffey, *Anthology of Kongo Religion*, 34.
36. Wyatt MacGaffey, cited in Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 108.
37. Fu Kiau Bunseki, quoted in *ibid.*, 109.
38. Quoted in Robert Farris Thompson, "The Grand Detroit N'Kondi," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 56, no. 4 (1978), 207-21.
39. W. Holman Bentley, *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language* (London: Baptist Missionary Society, 1887), 503.
40. Wyatt MacGaffey, *Modern Kongo Prophets: Religion in a Plural Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 125.
41. Robert Farris Thompson, "Betye and Renee: Priestesses of Chance and Medicine," in *The Migrations of Meaning* (New York: INTAR Gallery, 1992), 19.
42. Robert Farris Thompson, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas* (Munich: Prestel, 1993).
43. Fu Kiau Bunseki, interview by Robert Farris Thompson, October 1978, cited in *Flash of the Spirit*, 131.
44. Quoted in Kellie Jones, "David Hammons," *Real Life Magazine*, no. 16 (1986), 2.
45. From a page of Renée Stout's notebook, 1989, ink on paper, reproduced in *Astonishment and Power*.
46. Renée Stout, quoted in Michael Harris, "Resonance, Transformation, and Rhyme: The Art of Renée Stout," in MacGaffey, *Astonishment and Power*, 123.