Burkina Faso's Case by Case

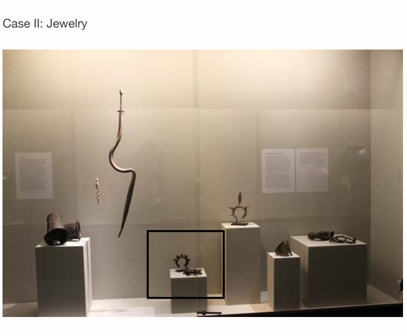
Case I: The Inland Niger Delta

Karl-Ferdinand Schaedler points out in *Earth and Ore*,1997, that 'The early West African kingdoms – Ghana, Mali, Songhai and Bambara – all enclosed one territory in their sphere of power which is referred to as the Inland Niger Delta.' Like the Nile in Upper and Lower Egypt, the Rivers Niger and Bani flooded the lowlands of the delta for roughly half the year. During that period the ancient populations withdrew to the surrounding highlands. There, they left a vivid record of their civilization in the form of terracotta vessels and figurative sculptures. All of these objects can be roughly dated to the 11th/12th to the 16th centuries AD. The Inland Niger Delta cultures have been identified as Djenne, Bankoni, Segou – or Bambara, and Tenenkun.

The time span corresponds to that of the great empires of the Sahel, in which cavalry played an important part. They can be dated – roughly, by scientific methods- from the 11th/12th to the 16th centuries.'

Schaedler, Karl-Ferdinand , *Earth and Ore: 2500 years of African Art in terra-cotta and Metal*,.Munich (Panterra Verlag), 1997.

Case II: Jewelry



The arts of personal adornment in Africa include body and face painting and scarification, coiffure, clothing, and jewelry. Enormous amounts of time and energy are devoted to the acquisition of raw materials, preparation, manufacture and connoisseurship of the objects produced in this vast industry. These arts are practiced by amateurs as well as professionals. They enhance the appearance of men, women and children, rich and poor, but they do more than that. The style of the hair, the marks on the face and body, the shape and color of apparel and the jewelry worn on head, face, neck, arms, torso and legs gives a great deal of information about the age, sex, marital status, immediate family and clan, social and political rank, and religion of the wearer. Jewelry may also have a magical, protective function. Bwa and Gurunsi women wear anklets with images of spirits that protect them. Mossi men once wore cast brass rings with images of the masks that guard their well-being.

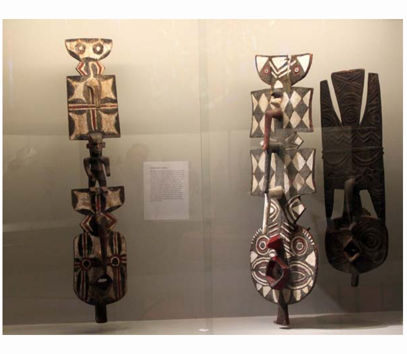
Materials and Techniques

African jewelry is made of anything that comes to the hand and fancy of the maker. But it is the metalwork that astonishes us by its imaginative form and extraordinary workmanship. Iron, bronze, brass, copper, silver, gold, aluminum, and tin may be used in pure form or combined to make alloys. Many pieces are made from recycled materials. The bracelet with the leaf mask in the center of this case is made from an aluminum alloy used in the engine blocks of the Peugeot mopeds that have been the most important means of transportation in Burkina Faso since the 1950s. (Roy, p. 75)
These metals may be forged, hot or cold cut, twisted, soldered together and/or cast. Casting in West Africa is by the lost wax process (Fr. moule a cire perdue – to mold on lost wax). In cire perdue, a wax image in the exact form of the desired metal object is formed around a clay core. An outer layer of clay is then applied to the surface of the wax. Sprues (tiny tubes) lead to the waxen layer.
When molten metal is poured into the sprues leading to the wax, it melts – is lost, perdue. The clay mold is then broken revealing the metal object within. The baked clay core may be removed, but frequently all or part of it is left inside the work of art. All of the objects in this case were made in this way.
The cire perdue method of metal casting is used all over the world. We find it in masterpieces from ancient China, Greece and Rome, renaissance Italy, and West Africa.

Case III: Chairs and Stools

Chairs and stools with three legs are for men. Stools with four legs are for women. Like most masks and figures, they are carved from one piece of wood. The beauty of the grain of the wood is revealed on the seat. Over time and with hard use the seat and handle acquire a patina, highly valued by the Burkinabe.
Men's reclining chairs, *dangalo*, are for relaxing in the cool of the evening after a hard day's work. Men's stools may be for working or sitting at a meeting (palaver). Women's stools are used for working. The handle, in the form of a head on a long neck, makes the stool easy to carry around. The size and shape make it easy to tuck under the skirt and between the legs.
'Decoration of the chairs ranges from simple notches to elaborate patterns of triangles, rectangles, diamonds and extraordinary carvings of animals like the crocodile. Carvers still produce chairs and stools in the traditional forms.
People treasure old chairs and stools as mementos, passing them down from generation to generation…Stools of the type shown here, from the Mouhoun River area, are sold and traded all over the border area between Mali and Burkina Faso. They are often mistakenly attributed to the Bwa, Bobo, Bamana, Mossi and other peoples.' Roy, op cit.

Case IV: Color and Pattern



The masks of the Nuna, Nunuma, Winiama and Lela are covered with patterns painted in red, black and white. The two masks on the left have retained most of their pattern and color. The very old bird mask on the right has lost its polychrome through age, wear and use. Its muted brown surface appeals to us because it reveals the beauty of the carving (just as we enjoy the pristine whiteness of ancient Greek sculpture, which was originally painted in bright colors). If the old bird mask were to be danced again, it would be repainted. Typical patterns include concentric circles, checkerboards, triangles, rectangles, and zigzags. Concentric circles around eyes are ubiquitous in Burkina Faso, but only the Nuna use lines that radiate from the pupil like the spokes of a wheel.

Case V: Plank Masks

Masks with tall superstructures having a board or 'plank'as the intrinsic form are called 'plank masks'. In Africa, they occur only in the Sudan: in Mali, among the Dogon, and in Burkina Faso, among the Mossi, the Bwa, and the group of peoples called Gurunsi (Nuna, Nunuma. et al). A spectacular piece of theater, the plank mask towers above all the other masks in a ceremony. Worn by a young, strong, well-trained dancer, it soars into the air when he jumps, carves great circles in space when he spins, and describes a great arc when he bends backwards and then forwards, touching the earth in the four cardinal points with the tip. Compare this Nuna plank mask with the Bwa *nwantantay* and the Dogon *sirige* in the Rotunda.

Case VI: The Lobi

The Lobi people inhabit an area at the meeting point of three countries: Burkina Faso, Ghana and Ivory Coast. The Lobi migrated to Burkina Faso in successive waves from northwestern Ghana, from the 18th to the end of the 19th centuries. In the past they were hunters and gatherers, now they are farmers, struggling for existence in the dry avannah. They are still moving southward, in search of more fertile soil for their slash and burn agriculture. They also raise goats, sheep, cattle and a great variety of fowl. During the dry season, when they cannot work in the fields, men build and repair houses and granaries, carve wooden sculptures and make musical instruments, such as the balophon. Women make pottery and baskets and work the marketplace.

The Bateba

Like most West African peoples, The Lobi believe that the universe is composed of a creator god, a host of supernatural creatures, and living and dead human beings. The structure of the universe is pyramidal. God, Tangba, is at the pinnacle, human beings are at the base. Under Tangba are the Thila, spirits with human characteristics. Below the Thila, but above human beings, are the spirits of the bush, the Kontuossi.
The Lobi relate to the supernatural world – the Thila and the Kontuossi – by means of the Bateba, statuettes of wood, clay or metal, made by village craftsmen. From the moment they are offered to a Thil or set upon an altar, they are thought to be living beings, able to protect humans and help them in many ways.

Case VII: Bateba Morphology

Bateba range in size from a few inches to a few feet. Larger Bateba are placed upon village altars. Smaller figures, for personal use, are placed upon the household shrine, carried about in the clothing or even worn around the neck. Life is regulated by the Thila, embodied – made visual, by Bateba. The spiritual power of the figures protects their owners from sorcery and evil spells, and helps them gain strength, happiness and wealth. The positions of the Bateba are specific and meaningful t o the Lobi. 'Bateba phuwe' stand with their arms hanging down at their sides. 'Dangerous bateba' extend their arms or raise one arm as if in defense or supplication. Sad bateba hold their hands under their chins.

Case VIII: Animal Spirits

The spirit world of African Animism is a continuum. Spirit, from God, is in human beings, animals, birds, insects, plants, air, water. The masks these spirits inhabit may be rendered visible in wood by any animate form or by a composite of two or more animal or human referents. The mask proper – the face or head, may be one kind of creature; the superstructure may be another. The salient characteristics of the animal spirit he is impersonating are expressed by the dancer.
In this case we find several popular mask types popular among the Nuna and Nunuma, sub-groups of the Gurunsi. From left to right: the snail (my opinion), warthog, chameleon – identified by his curly tail, crocodile – with menacing teeth and bedroom eyes, and the hyena or lion.

Case IX: Chairs and Stools

'Throughout the western Sudan, the chairs of men have three legs and those chairs or stools belonging to women have four legs. Lounging chairs are for men in the evening, when the sun is low in the sky and the air is cool. The male elders in Nuna villages light their clay or brass pipes, and lean back in the large carved chairs or 'dangalo'or the smaller backed stools called 'daon'.The men exchange news of the day or play with their children. Stools for women are stools for working. Women sit on them while they prepare food, tend their children, and do everything except relax.'

Christopher D. Roy and Thomas G.B. Wheelock. *Land of the Flying Masks: Art and Culture in Burkina Faso. The Thomas B. Wheelock Collection*. Munich (Prestel)

Tom Wheelock and Bill Wright

'Late in the spring of 1972, with an intent to traverse the globe, I ventured across the Sahara Desert in a Land Rover. My route was from Algiers, through the Hoggar Mountains to Aggadir in Niger. This was the season of sandstorms. After an arduous journey, I finally crossed the border into Burkina Faso and headed toward Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulaso. When I arrived in Ouagadougou, I headed straight for the American Embassy. The staff allowed me to camp beside the embassy swimming pool. There I met a peripatetic American art dealer, William Wright, in his road-weary, bright yellow, VW bus. Wright had been buying bronzes for a pittance in Bobo Dioulasso and selling them for unconscionable sums 5,000 miles farther west to retailers like Bloomingdales.
Bill Wright was an affable man with a most engaging enthusiasm. I soon was witness to all manner of wonders, produced from old grain sacks packed away in the depths of his bus. I only recollect an iron staff surmounted by a brass figure, but it was enough to have fatally piqued an acquisitive interest. Wright, not the least daunted by my expressed interest in pursuing an enterprise similar to his, gave me the names of local men who could help me procure traditional objects in the field.
Neither of us could have imagined that the forthrightness of that afternoon would lead to many years of the most pleasurably conducted business as could only befit a lasting friendship such as developed between us.'

From Tom Wheelock's introduction to *Land of the Flying Masks: Art and Culture in Burkina Faso, The Thomas B. Wheelock* Collection, by Christopher D. Roy and Thomas G.B. Wheelock, Prestel: Munich, Berlin, London, New York.

Case X: Mossi Figure Sculpture

'The literature on Mossi wooden figures indicates that they have two separate uses. Some are decorative figures of women or animals to placed in the chief's hut. Other figures, commemorating ancestors, are perhaps carried on the head during burials or borne in funerary processions as images of the deceased. These same ancestral figures may appear in sacrifices when the spirits of the royal ancestors are asked to provide for the safety of the community. They are placed on altars during the intervening periods.'

Christopher Roy. *Mossi Chief's Figures*. African Arts XV, IV, p. 52-59

Case XI: Nakomse and Nyonyose

The Nakomse are the descendents of the Mossi who invaded the area around the basin of the White Volta River about five hundred years ago. They were skilled cavalry men and easily defeated the indigenous residents, who were collectively known as the Tengabisi, 'children of the earth'. The Tengabisi may be divided into clans of blacksmiths and clans of farmers. The farmers are called Nyonyose, 'the old ones' without regard for the ethnic group to which they belong.
All the masks in this case are Mossi, but the mask on the left has some of the iconography and style characteristic of the old traditional masks of the farmer clans, the Nyonyose. The two masks on the right are classic Mossi style plank masks, with warlike visors that resemble ancient Greek helmets.

Christopher Roy. *Mossi Chiefs'* Figures. African Arts XV, IV p. 52-59

Case XII: Nyonyosi Stone Sculpture

'Nioniossi (sic) stone sculptures have been dated to the fourteenth century AD on the basis of oral history, with corroboration from inscriptions on the tombs of rulers. A people called Kurumba had established a state, Lurum, in about AD 1350 in the northern Yatenga region of what is now Burkina Faso. When the Mossi invaded the area, many peoples, including the Dogon, fled. The Kurumba remained in their ancestral homeland. They were recognized by the Mossi as 'Nioniossi' or 'the settled people', masters of the land. Sculptures like these were owned by families or clans. With the exception of the phallic sculptures, the stone figures are abstract or symbolic representations of a deceased person. They provide a home for the soul 'that which returns'.
Werner Gillon. *A Short History of African Art*. chapter 5. p 87

Case XIII: Bura, Sudan and Niger Delta

The archeological site of Bura-Asinda-Sika is a necropolis located northwest of Niamey, the capital of Niger. Bura relics have also come to light on the other side of the Niger River, in Burkina Faso. This is the territory of the ancient Songhai Empire, founded in 846 AD.
The excavations of the Bura site date to 1975, when a man accidentally found two Bura heads and gave them to his children to play with (Schaedler, 1997). A large number of terra cotta works were found in grave sites and assigned to a period dating from the third to the tenth and eleventh centuries AD. These include conical receptacles for grave goods, half figures, equestrian figures and heads Typically, Bura heads are flat, with a longitudinal bulge in the center of the face, as in our charming half figure.

Kingdoms of the Sudan

'In the territories which constitute today's states of Senegambia, Mauretania, Mali and Burkina Faso, there developed an early African civilization which produced a West Sudanic culture, with distinctive art styles. Although some ethnic groups belonging to this culture migrated from their original habitats, stylistic features which developed in antiquity can be recognized in art works produced into the twentieth century.
The Dogon have been linked with the Voltaic people for linguistic reasons, as have the Senufo, who may have migrated to their present area from the Inland Niger Delta. The snake, turtle and crocodile are common denominators in the art of Djenne, the Dogon and Senufo.
Ghana was a powerful kingdom when the north of Africa was Islamicized in the eighth century AD. The great mosque of Jenne (Djenne), shown in the photograph to your left, dates back to the fourteenth century. Built of mud and wood, it is renewed annually.

The Kingdom of Ghana was succeeded by the Empire of Mali, which was regarded as an equal by the North African states, the Kingdom of Portugal and mediterranean countries. Mali began its decline in the mid-fifteenth century under pressure from the Tuareg and the Songhai under their great leader Sunni Ali (1464). Toward the end of the seventeenth century, the Bamana, ended their subservience to the Empire of Songhai and founded their own states: Segou and Kaarta. They in turn were overcome by the Fulani in the nineteenth century.

The Inland Niger Delta

Karl Ferdinand Schaedler's Earth and Ore is one of the best reference works on African pottery and metalwork. The Inland Niger Delta, located in the present day Republic of Mali, is critically important in the history of the western Sudan because it was important in the development of the early West African kingdoms: Ghana, Mali, Songhai and Bambara. Schaedler points out that its climate and topography are similar to those of the Nile Valley in Egypt. 'Every year from June to December, large areas of this territory are inundated by the rivers Niger and Bani… On the hills of the Delta Toguere, to which the population withdraws during the period of inundation, sculptures and vessels have been found for over fifty years…These have come overseas only during the last two decades (from 1977-1997). Of the different styles named after their respective archeological sites, Djenne, Bankoni, Segou (Bamana), Tenenkun, Djenne is the most important.

Case XIV: The Dama and the Kanaga Mask

The function of the Dama is to control the secret force that emanates from the dead. The collective power of the masks directs that dangerous spiritual force, the nyama, to a sacred space where it will be fixed for eternity. At the end of the dama, the deceased will belong to the ranks of the ancestors of the Dogon people. Individually and collectively, the ancestors transmit the word of Amma, the creator god, to man. The word of Amma, like the word of God in the Old Testament, is a vital force, with the power to fertilize the fields and make fecund all living creatures. There is no mask for Amma; all creation may be thought of as the mask of God. The masks making visible the characters in the dama are manifestations of various aspects of the vital force of the universe.

The Kanaga Mask

The Dogon people use seventy eight different masks in their great cosmic dance/drama, the Dama, performed at intervals of five years. It is an abstract symbol of a bird , the bustard, an important character in the Dogon creation myth. The kanaga mask always takes the basic shape of a quadruped seen from above, but the four 'legs' are the wings of the bird. The head of the bird, resembling a warrior wearing a helmet, gives the mask its forbidding aspect. In contrast to most African masks which are monoxylic (carved of one piece of wood) the kanaga is an assemblage of five distinct parts. It is sometimes

embellished with two figures, the mythical primordial couple.

The Meaning of Kanaga

To the uninitiated, the kanaga mask evokes a bird, but for those who have attained knowledge through initiation into the secret society, it is the symbol of man, axis of the world, pointing to earth and sky. It is the water insect at the beginning of time, who planted the first seed from which all other seeds sprang.
The kanaga masquerader communicates the excitement of this cosmic event through his dance. With a rapid movement of the upper part of his body, he sweeps the mask close to the ground, reenacting the internal vibration that animated the matter created by Amma.
The flat board representing the body of the kanaga refers to the body of Oro the fox, the first transgressor, crushed when he fell from heaven.

Case XV: Walu, the Antelope Mask and Komo Society Masks

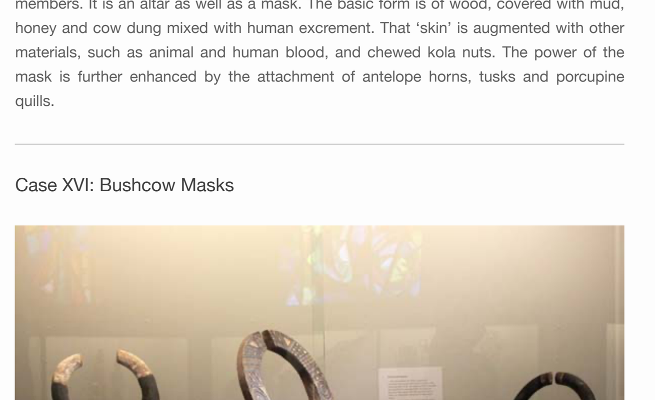
Walu, the Antelope Mask of the Dogon People of Mali

This mask depicts a mythical antelope known to the Dogon as Walu. At the time of creation, God (Amma) assigned Walu to protect the sun from Oro (Yurugu), Fox.
The Walu mask always has a rectangular face, a long straight nose, rectangular or triangular eye holes set far behind the facial plane, and long horns and ears. This is an unusually large and impressive example, painted in red and silver commercial paint; the black is a natural pigment. These are not necessarily the original colors; the members of the Awa mask society, which owns the masks, repaint them for every dama (great mask festival), at five year intervals. Our Walu retains a fragment of its original costume.

Komo Society Mask of the Bamana People of Mali

Komo masks are worn and seen only by men who have been initiated into the powerful komo association. In their rites, komo practitioners use the spiritual power in the masks to fight black magic and evil. The mask is constructed in secret, in the bush, by komo members. It is an altar as well as a mask. The basic form is of wood, covered with mud, honey and cow dung mixed with human excrement. That 'skin' is augmented with other materials, such as animal and human blood, and chewed kola nuts. The power of the mask is further enhanced by the attachment of antelope horns, tusks and porcupine quills.

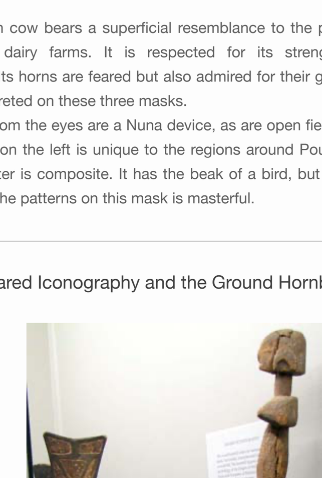
Case XVI: Bushcow Masks



Bushcow Masks

The African bush cow bears a superficial resemblance to the peaceful animal we know from American dairy farms. It is respected for its strength, and feared for its unpredictability. Its horns are feared but also admired for their graceful curves, which are beautifully interpreted on these three masks.
Lines radiating from the eyes are a Nuna device, as are open fields of white pigment. The petaloid pattern on the left is unique to the regions around Poura or Silli. The Nounama mask in the center is composite. It has the beak of a bird, but the horns of a bushcow. The handling of the patterns on this mask is masterful.

Case XVII: Shared Iconography and the Ground Hornbill



Shared Iconography

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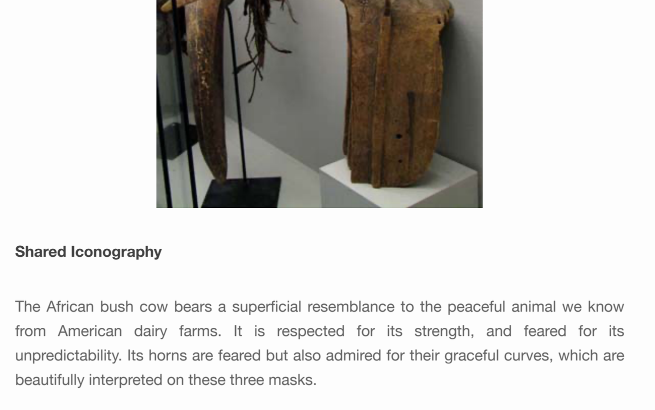

The Ground Hornbill

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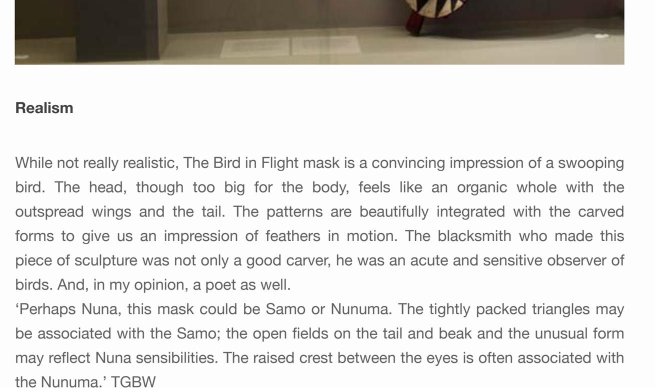
Case XVIII: Realism and Abstraction



Realism

While not really realistic, The Bird in Flight mask is a convincing impression of a swooping bird. The head, though too big for the body, feels like an organic whole with the outspread wings and the tail. The patterns are beautifully integrated with the carved forms to give us an impression of feathers in motion. The blacksmith who made this piece of sculpture was not only a good carver, he was an acute and sensitive observer of birds. And, in my opinion, a poet as well.
'Perhaps Nuna, this mask could be Samo or Nunuma. The tightly packed triangles may be associated with the Samo; the open fields on the tail and beak and the unusual form may reflect Nuna sensibilities. The raised crest between the eyes is often associated with the Nunuma.' TGBW

Abstraction

The hook on the round form at the base of this mask appears on many Gurunsi and Bwa planks. It is an abstract reference to the beak of a bird. The paired black and white triangles are a typical Nuna design. The black and white checkerboard pattern on the large Bwa plank mask in the Rotunda means the separation of wisdom (black) from ignorance (white), necessary for the initiation of a boy into the wisdom of a man. We cannot assume that the Nuna pattern means the same thing, but it is tempting to speculate that the two visual ideas may have a common root. In any case, both the checkerboard and the triangles are sophisticated geometrical patterns with figure/ground ambiguity, a commonplace in twentieth century abstract painting.

Case XIX: The Gurunsi and the Antelope Masks

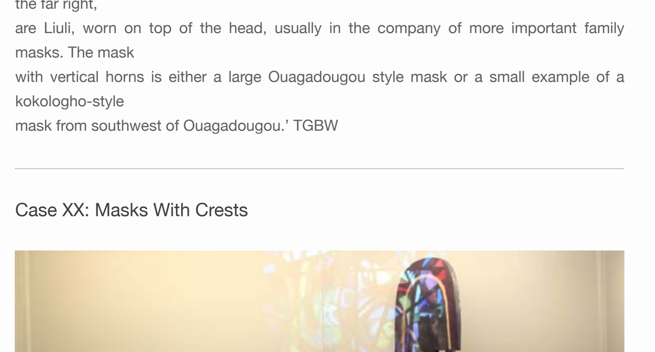
The Gurunsi

'Gurunsi' is a pejorative Mossi word meaning 'those who eat the bark of trees'
The Nuna, Nunuma, Lela, Sisala, Kasena, Nankana, Kusase and Winiama, who constitute the Gurunsi, do not use that name to identify themselves. Howver, 'Gurunsi' is a useful term for referring to a cultural area in Burkina Faso, and since it has been widely used in the literature on African art, we use it in our exhibition in a precise and limited way.
The Gurunsi are the seminal people in the figurative art of Burkina Faso. The Bwa, the Mossi and the Dafing have all been greatly influenced by their forms and their iconography. The Bobo, the Lobi and the Senufo have developed their art forms independently of the Gurunsi.
The Gurunsi occupy the central part of Burkina Faso, an area good for farming, but infested with tsetse flies, the vectors for trypanosomiasis, sleeping sickness.
When their horses were decimated by the tsetse fly, the invading Mossi thought they were destroyed by the magic of the forest-dwelling natives, the nyonyose. To this day, the Gurunsi/Nyonyose are feared for their magical powers.
The Gurunsi believe in a supreme God, Yi, who created the world and then left it to Su, the mask spirit. They make dozens of different types of masks – bush buffalo, antelope, pigs, hyenas, serpents, crocodiles, birds, insects and several kinds of human beings. Other masks are abstract or take the form of broad short planks with curving beaks, posts, hooks, crests and a multitude of other shapes. All of these may be thought of as aspects of Su.

Antelope Masks

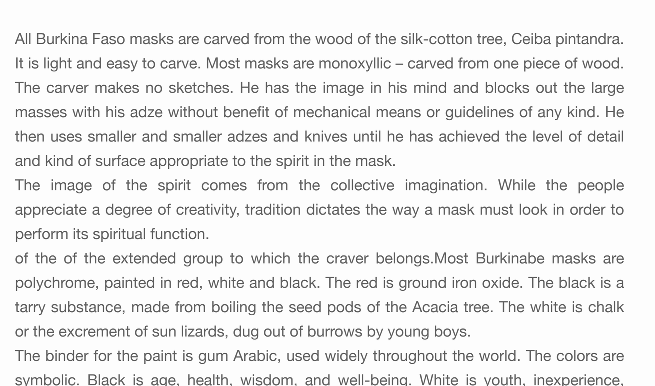
All hollow-horned foragers, antelope are prey to a number of carnivores, including man, but they are so beautiful, especially in motion, that, according to African legend, t hey can 'stop the heart of the
hunter' so he cannot bring himself to kill them.
The Marka-Dafing mask 'kou', on the far left, has blocky horns and rectangular tab ears. A trapezoidal
chin hand-hold with deeply incised vertical lines, and a one-to-one ratio of face to forehead are
characteristic of Marka-Dafing masks. The two Wan-nyaka masks, in the center and on the far right,
are Liuli, worn on top of the head, usually in the company of more important family masks. The mask
with vertical horns is either a large Ouagadougou style mask or a small example of a kokologho-style
mask from southwest of Ouagadougou.' TGBW

Case XX: Masks With Crests



An archaic Middle English meaning of the word crest is 'pride, courage, spirit'. We find crests on many birds; the male of the species spreads and displays the crest when he courts the female. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries many bird species were decimated because fashion decreed the wearing of hats with feathers. In ancient armor, the crest is the plume of feathers on top of a helmet. The word also refers to a tuft on an animal's head or a mane on his neck.
In Africa, a crest is frequently part of the coiffure of both men and women. The hair may be shaped over an armature of wood or fiber or it may be modeled with mud or other substance that will hold its form. In Burkina Faso, double crests are used only by the Winiama.

Case XXI: Carving and Wearing a Mask



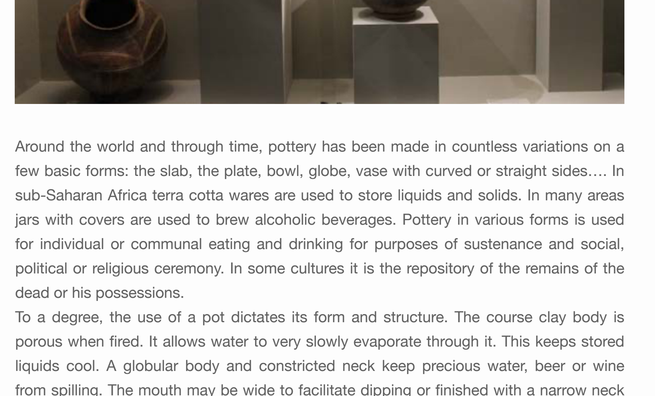
Carving a Mask

All Burkina Faso masks are carved from the wood of the silk-cotton tree, Ceiba pintandra. It is light and easy to carve. Most masks are monoxyllic – carved from one piece of wood. The carver makes no sketches. He has the image in his mind and blocks out the large masses with his adze without benefit of mechanical means or guidelines of any kind. He then uses smaller and smaller adzes and knives until he has achieved the level of detail and kind of surface appropriate to the spirit in the mask.
The image of the spirit comes from the collective imagination. While the people appreciate a degree of creativity, tradition dictates the way a mask must look in order to perform its spiritual function.
of the of the extended group to which the craver belongs.Most Burkinabe masks are polychrome, painted in red, white and black. The red is ground iron oxide. The black is a tarry substance, made from boiling the seed pods of the Acacia tree. The white is chalk or the excrement of sun lizards, dug out of burrows by young boys.
The binder for the paint is gum Arabic, used widely throughout the world. The colors are symbolic. Black is age, health, wisdom, and well-being. White is youth, inexperience, death and illness. Red is danger and the spirit world.

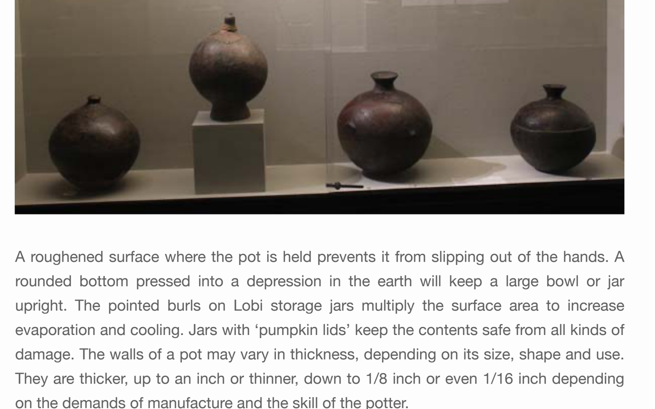
Wearing a Mask

A mask is a prized possession. It is commissioned by a family, clan or village and handed down through generations, gaining spiritual power with use and age. It is worn by a young man who belongs to the social unit that owns the mask. That young man has been initiated into the men's secret society, where he is first introduced to the village masks, then taught their meanings, then their dances. Finally, he is allowed to wear a mask. The young women have been initiated into their own secret society. They dance along with the men, though not with masks.
Some masks weigh as much as fifty pounds. With experience, dancers develop specialized muscles in the upper body and can perform extraordinary feats of agility and strength.

Case XXII-XXIII: Form and Function



Around the world and through time, pottery has been made in countless variations on a few basic forms: the slab, the plate, bowl, globe, vase with curved or straight sides…. In sub-Saharan Africa terra cotta wares are used to store liquids and solids. In many areas jars with covers are used to brew alcoholic beverages. Pottery in various forms is used for individual or communal eating and drinking for purposes of sustenance and social, political or religious ceremony. In some cultures it is the repository of the remains of the dead or his possessions.
To a degree, the use of a pot dictates its form and structure. The course clay body is porous when fired. It allows water to very slowly evaporate through it. This keeps stored liquids cool. A globular body and constricted neck keep precious water, beer or wine from spilling. The mouth may be wide to facilitate dipping or finished with a narrow neck and spout to permit pouring.



A roughened surface where the pot is held prevents it from slipping out of the hands. A rounded bottom pressed into a depression in the earth will keep a large bowl or jar upright. The pointed burls on Lobi storage jars multiply the surface area to increase evaporation and cooling. Jars with 'pumpkin lids' keep the contents safe from all kinds of damage. The walls of a pot may vary in thickness, depending on its size, shape and use. They are thicker, up to an inch or thinner, down to 1/8 inch or even 1/16 inch depending on the demands of manufacture and the skill of the potter.

Case XXIV: Decoration

We refer to the parts of a pot as follows: the foot, the waist, the shoulders, the neck the lip, the handle(s), the spout. These are not only important to the structural integrity of a vessel, they are natural focal points for decorative emphasis and enhancement.
'Very often women decorate their pottery with raised lines that represent scars or graphic patterns or with incised lines that belong to the same body of graphic patterns carved on masks or woven into textiles. In addition they apply figurative shapes such as faces, breasts umbilici and more. I have often asked about the decoration and the artists reply that it is to make them (the pots) pretty. Women begin to talk about magical protection provided by the designs if I am more persistent. Some older women wear marks on their bellies that are identical to those on the pots.
Some of these are applied after the birth of each of their first children. It is quite apparent that the jars are metaphors for the protective, nurturing character of the body of a woman.
'Roy, 'The Art of Burkina Faso in a Cultural Context' in *Land of the Flying Masks: Art and Culture in Burkina Faso*. Prestel, 2010.
The lack of a kiln, with its capacity for high firing, precludes the use of glazes on African pottery. But surfaces may be treated with many kinds of substances to add color. They may, in addition, be burnished with a pebble, bone, or shell. The contrast between rough and smooth areas is part of the aesthetic of African pottery.

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