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*Forms and Processes of African Sculpture*

by ROBERT PLANT ARMSTRONG



*Occasional Publication of the  
African and Afro-American Research Institute  
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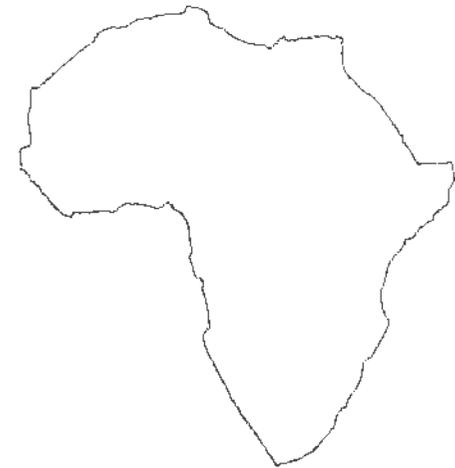
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Frustration is surely the reward of anyone who addresses himself to an introductory lecture in any field. Indeed, everyone who undertakes such a lecture is a gambler, betting against unknown odds that he can on but one occasion present to an audience, of whom he knows very little, sufficient information and sufficient perspective and point of view to have achieved among his listeners not only a certain level of information, but also a certain familiarity with his own attitudes.

In the case of an introductory talk on African sculpture the odds against one's being effective are particularly great, for the fact of the matter is that there is a better than even chance that at least some among his audience who have had previous experience with African sculpture have, sadly, caught on to certain prevailing misconceptions—that the sculptures of Africa are all "fetishes," or "fertility" figures, neither of which is entirely true; that African art was derived from other, "higher" civilizations, which it was only in minor and very recent respects; that its forms are "primitive" and "child-like," which in the overwhelming majority of cases they are not; that the pieces are everywhere utilitarian and that there is no real sense of "beauty," which is a false proposition.

A further trap awaiting him who would introduce African sculpture is to be found in the magnitude of the field, for "the sculpture

of Africa" is a generalization encompassing at the very least 122 distinct and major art-producing ethnic groups. This number is only a very convenient one, deriving its sole legitimacy from the fact that this is the number William Fagg includes in his book *Tribes and Forms in African Art*, which happens, as I write this, to be the book closest to me. There could easily be marked variation from this number, depending notably upon how exhaustive is one's representation of groups, and upon how he defines "tribe"—if that is the basis of his inventory. It is obvious that an introductory lecturer who attempts to be encompassive courts at worst chaos and at best tedium.

A further disadvantage against which one must labor is to be found in the fact that all the works with which he is concerned come from cultures very different from both his own and that of most of his audience, who often must quickly learn new and very strange perceptual idioms, which in some cases understandably seem "bizarre." This process of visual training often cannot take place as rapidly as one might wish, and so it sometimes happens that newcomers to the arts, especially, will perhaps feel a great disparity between the lecturer's enthusiasm for the art and the art itself.

Yet an additional liability lies in the fact that of necessity all context is denied the works, and they are left to speak for themselves, out of context, in a strange world. I wish I could speak on this point especially, for it is one in which I am particularly interested.

One way around all these difficulties is to do what has always been done before, in both lectures and general books, which is quite frankly to forget some of the more subtle problems and to survey the field from west to east, stopping probably with the eastern border of Congo. The reason for stopping at this point is that it is generally conceded there is not too much east of this line, save a bit here and there—the Makonde . . . a few Zulu works . . . and the rock

paintings of the Kalahari. But though this approach is straightforward, and though it avoids complexities, it also ignores both the possibility of and the responsibility for any kind of generalization.

It is for these latter reasons that I am not content to follow this traditional plan. On the contrary, I feel challenged both to present a lecture which gives evidence of my having thought freshly about the materials I shall present to you, and to improve upon the usual plan of procedure. The result of the usual introductory lecture, I fear, is little more than a great amount of visual excitement, which is not only admirable but even inevitable, for after all the works are most eloquently their own best spokesmen. But little is ordinarily accomplished that will bring the works into memorable patterns of meaningful relatedness. It is this latter challenge I wish to try to meet, for today I propose to survey the sculpture of West and Central Africa in a way which is new, thoughtful, and, I trust, meaningful. If this requires violation of the very useful model of geographical order, at least it will show something of an intellectual order that should be compensatory.

It will, accordingly, be my purpose to be systematically concerned with the sculptural works of the peoples of that vast area lying between the Atlantic Ocean on the west and on the east the chain of lakes extending from Lake Albert through Lake Kivu and Lake Tanganyika; and between 15° north latitude and 10° south—or, as someone has put it, between the two deserts of the Sahara and the Kalahari. My objective will be in the first place to provide an inventory of some striking features of overall conception and execution of the body, and in the second place to identify some generalizations of aesthetic wholeness which seem to constitute the affective least common denominators of the works of the sculptural traditions of those African peoples. I shall form a trait list, as it were, not of all

the features to be encountered, for this would obviously be impossible in so brief a period of time, but rather of those features of works of African sculpture which are to be encountered as common elements in a significant number of separate ethnic traditions here and there throughout the area, features the prevalence of which—any "scientific" reservations notwithstanding—enables us to identify a given work as *African* rather than, let us say, *Micronesian*.

Lying behind the points I shall make is the assumption that the entire art-producing area of Africa is to be characterized at the conceptual level by a basic inventory of surprisingly few terms which occur again and again throughout the richly diverse sculpture of the vast area of our concern. These few concepts, further, are realized in some strikingly similar ways, in many instances even though thousands of miles may separate the producing cultures—as for one instance, out of numerous possible ones, the akua-ba of the Ashanti [1\*] and the funerary pieces of the Bakota [2], which, while differing in terms of complexity, are yet analytically similar.

What is most compellingly of interest is that out of the total possible spectrum of ways in art in which phenomena of the natural world may be conceived and executed—a spectrum equally available to cultures the world over—the cultures of Africa, like other constellations of cultures elsewhere, have elected to exploit a limited segment only of that spectrum, and the selection which the cultures of Africa have made is in weight and emphasis different from that made by other cultures in other areas of the world. It is this clustering within a limited segment of the spectrum of possibilities which defines the existence of an African style of sculpture. This African bias, for example, is to be most strikingly seen when contrasted with the formal concepts used in the sculptural universe of other areas

\* See "Key to Illustrations," pp 21–23.

of the world—let us say Southern Asia and the Malayan archipelago.

Others have been interested in the fact that there is, writ large, a familiarity to African sculpture and have tried to identify in what features this genetic commonality lay.

In 1921, Carl Einstein attempted to make an overall definition of African art. He noted that the concentration of form and its relation to space was the primary consideration of African artists, whereas the Oceanic (or South Pacific) artist was much more interested in the decorative pattern, in disconnected motifs subjected to an infinite number of variations.<sup>1</sup>

Michel Leiras and Jacqueline Delange, in their impressive *African Art*, further observe that

Some Oceanic sculpture such as the *tiki* from the Marquesas Islands, or the Easter Island statues, is far from being "disconnected," while we certainly find "disconnected" sculpture in Africa.<sup>2</sup>

Their error in dismissing Einstein's perception, it seems to me, is a common one. They appear to reject the significance of that special category of evidence which is prefaced by the phrase "in general," which is informally and impressionistically statistical. Thus the truth of the "in general" category of evidence is not to be gained by a few exceptions. The listing of exceptions does not refute the fact that there are among works of African sculpture certain remarkable similarities.

The perceptions of the category of the "in general" imply a certain amount of analysis, to be sure, but they imply synthesis beyond

<sup>1</sup> Michel Leiras and Jacqueline Delange, *African Art* (London, 1968), p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

the mere exercise of analysis. It is the end product of this process of synthesizing which will interest us here.

### *The Conceptual Inventory*

The formulation and execution of works of sculpture are necessarily either of forms that exist in the natural world or else of forms that are born in the imagination of the artist or exist as part of the imaginative heritage of his culture. These two types constitute two conceptual categories, and we shall, reasonably enough, refer to the first of these as *factual*, and to the second as *fanciful*. Now it is further true of the factual category of works that there are two classes of works possible, *one* whose members bear a close relationship to forms in the natural world, and *another* whose members are, rather, extrapolations from and variations upon such forms, yet clearly reduplicative of natural analogues. The fanciful category freely extrapolates from forms, being, however, truer to invention than to any natural analogue. Works in this latter category are often *thematic* rather than depictive with respect to natural forms.

It is clear that these two categories of works constitute a continuum. Those works of the factual category, based upon the natural forms, range from portraiture to free extrapolation from the human form, while those of the second category have, theoretically, no bounds to the freedom of their invention. In having here arbitrarily divided what is in reality a continuum, I must enter the caution that it will therefore be in our mutual best interests if we understand at the outset rather than separate, discrete classes, I have in point of fact but designated *poles* toward one or another of which all African sculptural works tend. It is therefore important to bear in mind that the establishment of these classes has chiefly an heuristic value.

It follows from all this that it is not always possible to classify each work perfectly accurately, with the result that there may be differences of opinion about the placement of given works. But insofar as the poles we are talking of have been established to be suggestive rather than definitive, this business of ambiguity here and there is not significant.

#### 1. The Factual Continuum

##### A. The naturalistic class.

The first class or pole of the factual category or segment of our continuum, that one whose works strive to bear a reasonably close relationship to natural analogues, is *naturalistic*. This use of the term *naturalism* admits a certain liberty; nonetheless the term best fits the range of the phenomena with which we are concerned. For the fact of the matter is that whether naturalistic in the sense in which one ordinarily uses the term, as in the famous Tada bronze [3] from Nigeria, or in a highly schematized rendition, as we see in this Nigerian twin figure [4], the works of this class are clearly ones which yet accurately reflect the structure and the musculature of the natural form, a sense of the body in its own terms.

As between these two works, it is clear that an additional aspect of the range is revealed, for the bronze work approaches the individualism of portraiture, while the figure in wood does not, a fact which will become clearer as we observe several more *ibeji* [5, 6] and thus have the opportunity to see the respect in which they are clearly *general* or classificatory in their execution. This is to say that large samples reveal to us that the familiarity of these twin figures, their subscription to an *ibeji type*, is more important than their anatomical and facial individualization. At the same time it will be useful to see a few more portraits, in this case terra cotta [7] and bronze [8]

heads from Ife, dating from prior to the 15th century, so that we may further contrast these two traditions representing the extremes of the naturalistic class of the factual category.

A caveat must be entered here to the effect that we may not be too arbitrary in our statements about portraiture, for it has been observed that there is a sense of individualization even in some of the more highly stylized naturalistic figures, and that for example this is often achieved in the carving of the mouth.

A further interesting case in connection with portraiture is provided by the statues of the kings [9] of the Bushongo (Bakuba), who for at least 300 years had portrait statues made, exhibiting what to our perceptions may often seem minimal differences, though iconographical distinctions intended to individualize the king were always incorporated.

If we establish the Ife works at one end of the continuum and place the Bushongo kings well along toward the continuum in the direction of schematic naturalism, the ibeji and indeed the vast majority of African sculptures in this naturalistic class are to be placed at this latter end of the continuum rather than at the portraitistic beginning. Representative of this end of the population are the Yoruba ivory figure [10], the Baoule, Baluba, and Beoe Lulua figures [11, 12, 13], and the Dan and Yoruba Gelede masks [14, 15].

#### B. The analytic class.

The second class of the category of factual African sculpture is that one whose members are extrapolated from natural forms, works which eventuate from the analysis of and/or generalization from natural forms. These works exhibit a greater interest in the effect of the artist's imaginative analysis than in representation, and we shall call this class *analytical*. It is to be further characterized as

comprising three sub-classes, those whose members are to be characterized as first *involved*, second *exvolved*, and third, in contrast to these two opposing characteristics, *noninvolved*.

The chief criterion of this class is to be found in the fact that in the class of naturalistic works, artists are concerned primarily to create the body, while in the class of analytical works the artists are concerned primarily to execute the imagination, by means of creating the body significantly illuminated or modified by the imagination, but yet in the direction of tribute to natural forms. The members of the analytical class may show either radical analysis, as in the case of the somewhat cubistic Baloma [16] piece, or great simplification, as in the case of the Basa-Nge figure [17].

The question, of course, is the establishment of that point at which the form is "significantly illuminated or changed." Let us approach this problem by means of the example provided by three figures, a Senufo female figure [18], a Fon bronze casting [19], and an Ashanti goldweight [20], also in bronze. Now of these three there is little doubt that, although each of them is dramatically linear, the thrust of the Senufo piece is in the direction of naturalism while that of the Ashanti goldweight is in the direction of analysis. This determination leaves the Fon piece in question. Because of the exaggeration of its arms, however, and of the lack of any strong sense of musculature, because the figure in a word tends to evince the artist's greater interest in design than in body, I place it in the analytic class. The Ashanti piece is significantly transmogrified; the Fon piece requires some further degree of interpretation and may in the long run, in fact, yet leave room for slight equivocation. This is precisely the kind of ambiguous work I earlier mentioned. As such, it is not an uncommon phenomenon in the study of human action. Since I have already observed the

weight of our population is tipped in favor of those works which schematize naturalism, it is probably justifiable at this point to record that it is also heavy in the area of analysis. The schematic end of the naturalistic continuum and the whole continuum of analysis clearly encompass far and away the greatest part of African sculpture. This fact itself significantly reveals a generalization concerning the nature of African sculpture.

I have indicated three sub-classes of the analytic class which I shall consider in turn. First, the involuted style which turns in upon itself, typically exhibiting an underdevelopment of the trunk, which in fact tends to be enfolded or, as it were, parenthesized by the pectoral and pelvic masses. This tendency is obvious in the Fang figure [21], as indeed in the Bambole, Bafum, and Temne figures [22, 23, 24], and in the Dogon and Bakwile masks [26, 27].<sup>3</sup>

The exvolved style of analysis, no less than the other two types, is revealed by its name. Its chief feature is an intrusion of the body into space, rather than intrusion of space into the body, as is the case with the involuted style. Now intrusion of the body into space is not to be confused with extension into space, for the latter term designates a condition in which the figure as a whole, through torsion of the body and/or through extension of the limbs from the body, inserts itself maximally into space. Intrusion of the body into space comes about most notably by carving the vertebral column as positive rather than negative, and by executing the vertical midline of the abdomen so as to constitute a ridge. This tendency is well exemplified by the Malinke figure [28]. However exvolutionism may also be evidenced by a strong awareness of a general feeling of the extrusion of the piece, as for instance in the strident spatiality of the

<sup>3</sup> It is the Bakwile face mask that is described as involuted, not the superstructure on top.

Montol figure [29]. The Idoma [30] and Bafum [31] masks, as well as the Bambara [32] headdress, are also illustrative of this tendency.

Perhaps the most numerous of the three styles, however, is the nonvolutional, which displays a primary interest in analysis and/or generalization. But with respect to either their intrusion into space, or the intrusion of space into them, the works cannot be said to show a marked tendency in one direction or the other. In consequence of this dynamic of stasis, as it were, the figures of this sub-class of analysis range from a kind of geometricized naturalism, to be seen in the Urhobo figure [33], flattened, lined, or angled; from expressively rounded forms, like some of the Fang figures [34]; through to the exaggeratedly planar or rounded works such as are to be encountered among the Dogon on the one hand and the Balega [35] on the other.

## 2. The Fanciful Continuum

So much then for the factual continuum. The second category, that of the fanciful, includes all those works which have no formal counterparts in the natural world but rather are products of the conceptual imagination, of the sense of invention and of the fantasy of the artists of the culture. We remove from consideration here, by definition, all imaginative extrapolations from or variations upon the human body, whether by analysis or by generalization, *as long as such variations or inventions are unmistakably reduplicative analogues of forms in the natural world.*

Thus far our model has been one based solely upon conceptual considerations as these affect the form of the work. Here we must enlarge our model, for while it is true that there is a formal dimension to this category of the fanciful, it is also true that concept has

a distinctively substantive dimension as well. Thus while there are two classes of the fanciful, it is this substantive class of the fanciful category which evinces the greatest development. Specifically, when the forms are total abstractions, as in the case of the Toma mask [36], they are to be included in the first class, that of formal fancy, which, like the analogous class in the factual category, proceeds by means of analysis. Such invented creatures as are carved by the Mambila [37] are fanciful in content, not in concept, and belong to the second class of the fanciful, the substantively fanciful.

This category of the fanciful is richly developed in Europe and America, by all the nonrepresentational mobiles, stables, and free forms. It is developed also in the Pacific. But it is a category which finds surprisingly little exploitation in the figure carving of Africa—none that I can think of in the conceptually fanciful class, and few enough in the class of the substantively fanciful. The two inventions I have chosen are among the few exceptions in figure carving which illustrate the class of the substantively fanciful. It is worth noting that both works show remarkably similar exercises of the imagination, both the Dan spoon from the Ivory Coast [38] and the Pere trumpet [39] from two-thirds the way across the continent, near Lake Edward. At the same time, however, one must in all candor admit that it is doubtless a fairly predictable act of the imagination which gives a spoon and a trumpet—or for that matter, in our own civilization, a piano—legs.

It is significant, I think, that the category of the fanciful finds its greatest development not in the making of figures but rather in the creation of masks, though here too the greatest development is in the category of the substantively fanciful. The remarkable Bacham mask [40] is a case in point, where analysis has yielded to fancy, and where the effect is so great that terror is reputedly evoked in the

beholder who is co-cultural with it. I also call your attention to the Ngere mask [41], and the Kru mask [42]. These latter two seem to be exvolutional and involutional treatments of otherwise similar analytical conceptions. The Abua water-spirit [43] mask also commands our attention.

The significance of this markedly greater richness of the fanciful occurring in the masks is to be found in the fact that, according to the generalization that is frequently made, masks, insofar as they are concerned with power, tend to be transformational of the wearer. This is in contrast with the carved figures, which do not bring about the displacement of the human personality. It seems inevitable, therefore, that with so awesome an end to achieve, masks quite predictably exploit the realm of the fanciful rather than that of the factual.

This continuum of factual and fanciful then, with its constitutive poles, or classes and sub-classes, is modified by two sets of determinants, one set relating to the linear and the other set relating to the axial existence of works. These determinants are in the first instance linearity and curvilinearity, and in the second impacted axes, "normal" axes,<sup>1</sup> and attenuated axes. The addition of these determinants makes it possible to arrive at a classificatory model which will further account for the variety of sculptured forms to be encountered in the study of African sculpture.

Obviously one cannot give full development to the whole model here; not only would it be too time-consuming to do so, but it would so tax the patience of the audience that I would very likely alienate rather than persuade members of the audience. I would, however, like to show a few examples of these determinants. Thus

<sup>1</sup> "Normal" must be taken in the sense of African sculpture, where the head is typically larger than in life, the legs shorter, and the trunk more emphasized.

linearity is to be seen in the figures of the Bambara [44], and curvilinearity in the figures of the Chokwe [45].

An impacted vertical axis is to be seen in the stone nomoli [46] of Sierra Leone, medial development of the dominant vertical axis in the Ifa figure [47] from the Yoruba, and an attenuated vertical axis in the figure from the Mende [48].

With the brief mention of these determinants then, we conclude the discussion of the sculptural execution of the body. We may say in summary that of the total spectrum of possible styles, African art significantly exploits only a limited range of it, namely, that segment which extends from those works which proceed by a highly conventionalized or schematized naturalism through those which proceed by various kinds of analysis and generalization. It is underdeveloped, in the main, in the area of realistic portraiture, and with respect to figures also underdeveloped in the area of the fanciful; but in the genre of the mask the category of the fanciful finds rich exploitation. Here it is a revealing generalization to make to point out that when the other-worldly is to be presented, when overwhelming emotions are to be evoked, the invention of content is more significantly developed than the invention of form.

It will be interesting for further study to show us what other emphases are to be noted within this range, from the schematic to the analytic. Certainly it is the case that the class of analysis and generalization *appears* to be more numerous and to afford more diverse kinds of phenomena within it. There can be little doubt that further study would most profitably proceed under the circumstance that further breaking down of these sub-classes would be undertaken.

As among the alternatives of the determinants—impacted, medial, and attenuated axes—it is the class of the medial axes which seems to predominate in the sculptured figures of Africa.

### *The Processes of African Sculpture*

We have now had an opportunity to see something of works of African sculpture in terms of a kind of taxonomic approach, and after the manner of such an approach, I have been concerned with matters of morphology. But the title of my lecture commits me to a consideration of *forms and processes*. Now it is clear that "processes" may refer to two different kinds of dynamics—anthropologically speaking, "processes" refer to mechanisms of diffusion and change; aesthetically, "processes" designate those dynamics by means of which form eventuates and persists.

I could be—and perhaps should be—very inductive at this point, but time is my enemy. Accordingly I shall assert as an unsupported generalization that the least common denominator of all African sculpture—that principle of its metabolism, of its being, which accounts for its "African-ness"—is its special dynamic of *tension*, commonly existing as the causal substratum deeply within all the diversities we have thus far observed. Generalizations of this sort are addressed to the sense of the total affecting existence of a work, and in turn of course to the totality of all the works which taken together comprise the phylum *African sculpture*. These generalizations are supracategorical, being true of works whether factual or fanciful. They speak to the issue of *African sculpture*, writ very large indeed.

Einstein may very well have been right, but in fact I cannot clearly tell, for his generalization does not appear to be sufficiently analyzed. I have a *feeling*, however, that he was more on the mark than Leiras and Delange credit him with being. But as he states the case, he speaks to a *formal universal* in African sculpture. I think a *dynamic universal* is probably more justifiably to be sought.

If Einstein means what, in the absence of analysis, I presume him to mean, namely that forms are economical, his principle is then limited only by the fact that, being formal, it is partialistic, not fundamental, owing to the fact that it is a derivative phenomenon from that special fundamental *process of tension* which is the definitive characteristic of African sculpture. The tension of African sculpture is to be characterized as energy conserved rather than energy expended or expending. There are exceptions to this here and there, but they are so infrequent as to be notable. The best-known work which violates this principle of conserved energy is the famous Bangwa [49] dancer. But it is in general energy in reserve, *in potentia*, which gives to African sculpture its abiding sense of composure and dignity—which explains at least one of the reasons why certain pieces can be more readily regarded, by those whose works of art they are, as reservoirs of power and can accrue to themselves the ability to fill the beholder with awe [50], and sometimes terror. These are natural affective responses to energy so perfectly conserved.

It is thus an act of conservation which holds the energy, a perpetual enactment of restraint, and this is the secret principle of the particular tension of African sculpture, toward which Einstein's principle is merely but significantly contributory.

Each of the dominant concepts of body analysis and enactment which we discussed earlier is a means to the end of tension—the rigorous schematization of body areas, their analysis, their generalization, the means by which energy is instilled into the dominant axis of the body, the contained force of the linear forms, the more tightly wound force of the curvilinear ones. All of these means are at once both generative and conservative of energy.

Two additional factors which contribute to this condition of

tension are the dynamics of intension and of continuity, which I have discussed elsewhere at great length.<sup>5</sup> Briefly to explain this point, I may note that objects and events may exist in space either in extension—with arms and legs maximally and often complexly intruded into space—as is the case with much of the sculpture of India, or in intension, which is to say with the denial of extensionality. With respect to continuity, the over-all, long lines and volumes which constitute a work are emphasized; in discontinuity, the points of articulation and the component areas of the body are greatly exploited. In general, then, intensive continuity characterizes the works of Africa with notable exceptions such as the Chokwe [51], who often delight in showing the human figure in extension. The Chokwe also show a greater attention to the painstaking execution of the distal areas of the body than is in general characteristic of African sculpture.

The relationship of a work to gravity is a further dynamic of tension, that is to say that it is a significant factor of the sculpture whether a given work takes account of gravity as one of its conceptual principles, and if so in what fashion it does so. Thus Indian sculpture takes account of it by defying it; for Western romantics like Rodin, it is often a force to be overcome; for the sculptors of the Middle Ages, it seems hardly to have existed at all.

The sculpture of Africa unromantically, without bravado, stolidly, seriously, and withal unequivocally takes account of gravity in either one of two ways—asserting its force either through making the base great, as though gravity by means of that exercise which is its reality creates a kind of centripetality, forcing mass to the feet, as in the example from the Bambara [52]; or on the other

<sup>5</sup> See my forthcoming *The Affecting Presence: An Essay in Humanistic Anthropology* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1970).

hand, as though gravity is a force from which one quietly seeks liberation, as a tree does, growing greater as it grows higher. Thus it is that the Yoruba carve so that the body swells as it tears above the ground [53].

Although there are some forms where the role of gravity is not so dramatically expressed as it is in these two—as for example in the Anyi maternity figure [54]—nonetheless it is by and large the case that gravity is forcefully taken into account, more often after the model of the tree than after that of the pear.

Perhaps the final dynamic of conserved tension that characterizes African sculpture is achieved by means of its understatement, its quiet reserve, its tensile strength. No matter how unusual a work may appear to the inexperienced observer, he must, it seems to me, be struck by the sense of understated dignity which suffuses the figures, dignity which is *achieved* in the work, as a product of control through tension.

In sum then these represent the generalizations that can be made concerning African sculpture. We might justifiably say of African sculpture writ large that it is an art of *analytical humanism*, predominantly concerned with the theme and variations of man's form. That its special dynamic results from the fact that this analysis conserves rather than expends energy is a paradox which is the well-spring of its being. Furthermore, while we have not heretofore touched upon the topic of significance, I shall, at the risk of seeming gratuitous, say of African sculpture that it is distinctively *existential*, related in general to the service and expression of those moments in man's life when his being is critical or his sense of it acute. This is a further condition of its dynamic. These are all at the core of its being. African sculpture is ultimately man-related, and no more can be asked of any art. Indeed when one speaks of an art as being

"vital," he must surely mean something of this sort.

We have of course done more here than survey African sculpture. We have glimpsed the existence of certain generalizations of that sculpture's creative concepts and of the conditions of its total being. In this wise we have, as most of you will already have perceived, come close to formulating basic aesthetic generalizations about African sculpture, which is to say generalizations about the affectiveness of forms, about what are the formal conditions of that heightened feeling one recognizes as the hallmark of the work of art.

### Key to Illustrations

- B = Bodrogi, Tibor. *Art in Africa*. New York, 1968.  
 F = Fagg, William. *Tribes and Forms in African Art*. London, 1965.  
 L = Leiras, Michel and Delange, Jacqueline. *African Art*. London, 1968.  
 P = Plass, Margaret Webster. *African Miniatures: The Goldweights of the Ashanti*. London, 1967.  
 R = Robbins, Warren. *African Art in American Collections*. New York, n.d.  
 ILL = Illustrated in text.

- |   |                           |       |
|---|---------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Ashanti akua-ba           | L 113 |
| 2 | Bakota funerary piece     | F 77  |
| 3 | Yoruba Tada bronze figure | L 262 |
| 4 | Yoruba ibeji              | ILL   |
| 5 | Yoruba ibeji              | ILL   |

6	Yoruba ibeji	ILL
7	Yoruba Ife terra cotta head	L 86
8	Yoruba Ife bronze head	L 351
9	Bushongo king	L 34
10	Yoruba ivory figure	ILL
11	Baoule ancestor	ILL
12	Baluba stool	F 103
13	Bene Lulua figure	L 120
14	Dan mask	ILL
15	Yoruba Gelede mask	ILL
16	Baloma figure	R 259
17	Basa-Nge figure	F 39
18	Senufo figure	F 21
19	Fon bronze figure	ILL
20	Ashanti goldweight	P 31
21	Fang figure	ILL
22	Bambole figure	F 109
23	Bafum figure	F 64
24	Temne figure	F 6
25	De mask	F 16
26	Dogon mask	ILL
27	Bakwele mask	L 379
28	Malinke figure	F 66
29	Montol figure	F 45
30	Idoma headdress	F 41
31	Bafum mask	L 20
32	Bambara chi-wara	ILL
33	Urhobo figure	F 35
34	Fang figure	L 58
35	Balega figure	ILL
36	Toma mask	R 71
37	Mambila figure	L 361

38	Dan spoon	B 53
39	Pere trumpet	L 421
40	Bacham mask	F 65
41	Ngere mask	F 12
42	Kru mask	F 13
43	Abua mask	F 52
44	Bambara figure	ILL
45	Chokwe figure	L 412
46	Nomoli figure	ILL
47	Yoruba figure	ILL
48	Mende figure	F 7
49	Bangwa figure	F 66
50	Yoruba Epa mask	R 164
51	Chokwe figure	L 410
52	Bambara figure	ILL
53	Yoruba figure	ILL
54	Anyi figure	ILL

Photographs 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 14, 15, 26, 32, 47, 54 by Frank McMahon.  
Photographs 19, 21, 35, 44, 46, 52, 53 by Russell Kay.

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*Illustrations*

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4 Yoruba ibeji



5 Yoruba ibeji



6 Yoruba ibeji

10 Yoruba ivory figure



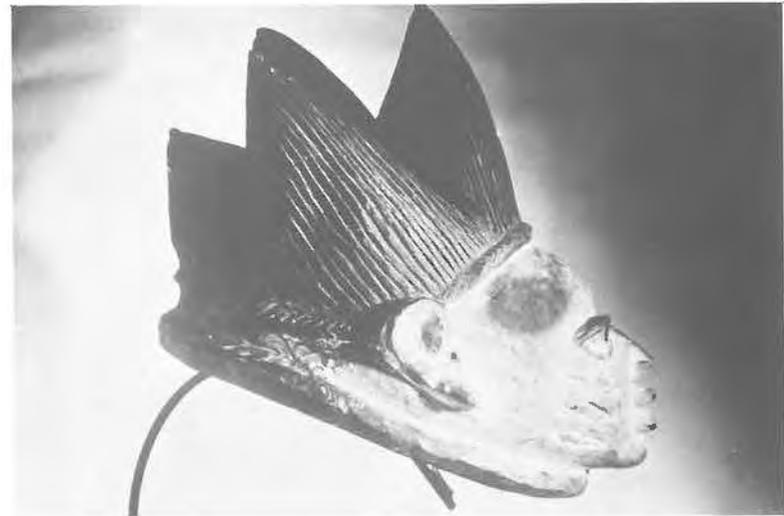
11 Baoule ancestor



14 Dan mask



15 Yoruba Gelede mask



19 Fon bronze figure

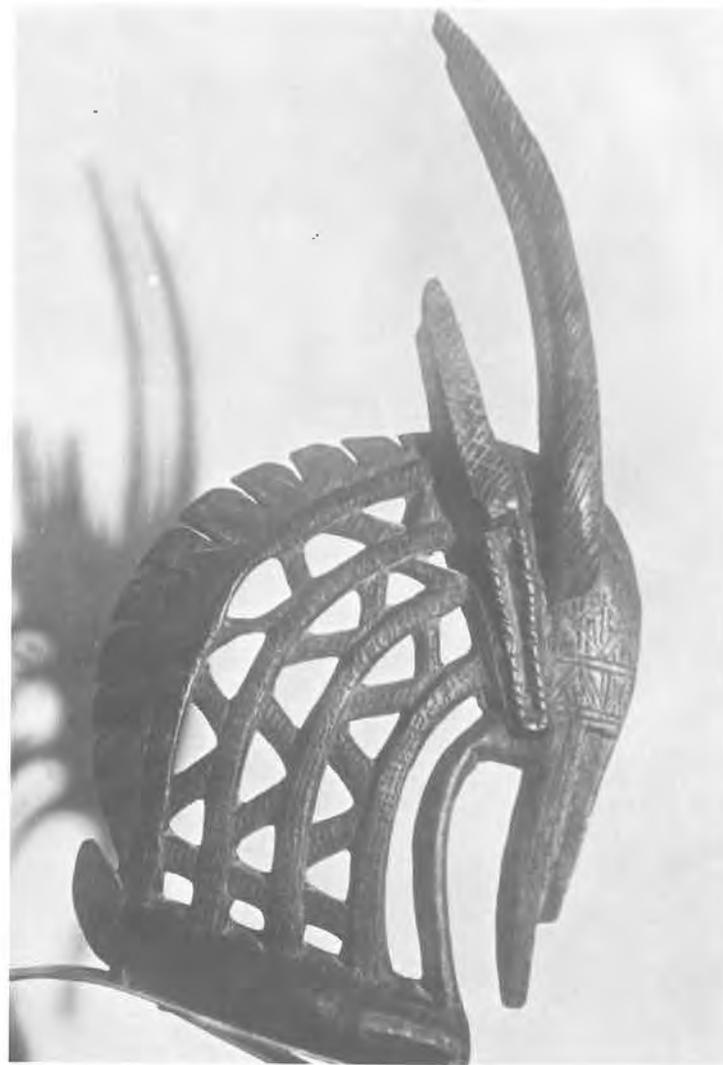
21 Fang figure



26 Dogon mask



32 Bambara *chi-wara*



35 *Balega figure*



44 *Bambara figure*



46 *Nomoli figure*



47 Yoruba figure



52 Bambara figure



53 Yoruba figure



54 Anyi figure



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"... I want to do a survey of course, for that is surely necessary if the amateurs are to be informed; but on the other hand I want to do it in a way that is both absolutely fresh and as conceptual as possible, so that the cognoscenti may be satisfied as well. Accordingly, I have abandoned the almost inevitable, and therefore utterly hackneyed, approach of the geographical progression from Guinea through the savannahs and along the coast and inland . . . I have chosen to operate on the assumption that it is simply the case, dammit (and all our caveats and reservations notwithstanding), *that there is a peculiar African-ness about African art which, in large, sets it apart from the art of other continents.* The peoples of Africa—their great ethnic diversity notwithstanding—have opted to concentrate on the development of one particular limited segment of the total possible spectrum of styles and forms . . . I shall, then, speak about these generalizations—of body conception, of certain kinds of detail, and of the aesthetic wholes—which may be seen to characterize African sculpture."

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ROBERT PLANT ARMSTRONG, a "humanistic anthropologist" and Director of Northwestern University Press, has been for many years an eminent student of African art, literature, and aesthetics. His book, *The Affecting Presence: An Essay in Humanistic Anthropology*, will be published in 1970 by the University of Illinois Press.

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