Power radiates from materials that accumulate on the surface of these objects. Without such adornment, these works would be commonplace, everyday. These expensive and eye-catching materials—horns, seeds, and shells, among others—speak to the spiritual and political authority of those who wear them, and draw a viewer’s eye toward important people and performances.
UNIDENTIFIED LOMA ARTIST

Hunter’s Tunic, 20th century
Lofa county, Liberia or Nzérékoré region, Guinea
Cotton, leather, cotton string, horns, animal teeth,
hide, paper, metal alloys, encrustation

GIFT OF PHILIP M. AND MICHELE M. ABRAMS,
VIENNA, VIRGINIA, BMA. 1984.213A
UNIDENTIFIED ANGAS ARTIST

Mask, mid-20th century
Plateau state, Nigeria
Abrus seeds, palm leaf fiber, cotton thread

GIFT OF S. JUDITH LONG, PEBBLE BEACH, CALIFORNIA,
BMA 1995.55
UNIDENTIFIED LEGA ARTIST

*Man’s Hat*, early-mid 20th century
Maniema or Sud-Kivu province, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Plant fiber, clam shells, mussel shells, nut shells, cowrie shells, and buttons

GIFT OF GILBERT AND JEAN JACKSON, BMA 2009.211
UNIDENTIFIED WÉ ARTIST

Ghona Gla (Mask of Wisdom), early-mid 20th century
Nimba or Grand Gedeh counties, Liberia or Montagnes district, Ivory Coast
Wood, copper alloy bells, human hair, cowrie shells, zinc alloy teeth, pigment, plant fiber, cotton

GIFT OF SANDRA R. LEICHTMAN, BALTIMORE, BMA 1991.356
These horizontal masks merge the features of two or more animals to create one frightening, otherworldly creature. Small-scale societies in the Sahel—a belt of grassland south of the Sahara—created these composite pieces to ward off evil and antisocial behavior. Each mask would have been worn by a member of a fraternal association charged with protecting the community.
UNIDENTIFIED SENUFO ARTIST

*Kpönyugu (Poro Association Funeral Helmet Mask)*,
late 19th century
Savanes or Denguélé region, Ivory Coast
Wood, encrustation

*Purchased as the gift of Janet Wurtzburger, BMA. 1966.17*
UNIDENTIFIED BAMANA ARTIST

*Kono Association Mask*, early 20th century
Sikasso region, Mali
Wood, encrustation, cotton string, feathers

PURCHASED WITH EXCHANGE FUNDS FROM
THE GIFT OF ALAN WURTZBURGER, BMA 1960.66
UNIDENTIFIED MANDING OR MINIANKA ARTIST

*Kòmòkun (Kômô Society Helmet Mask)*, early 20th century
Sikasso region, Mali or Kankan or Faranah region, Guinea
Wood, animal horns, bird skull, plant fibers, porcupine quills, encrustation, glass

GIFT OF ROBERT AND MARY CUMMING, BALTIMORE, BMA 1983.79
The raw emotion sculpted onto the faces of these figures resonates with the human experience of pain, loss, and suffering. These artworks were created to memorialize the dead and heal the sick, and their vivid, emotional realism allows them to speak across time and space. Although their bodies may appear crude or unrefined, their emotions are all too real.
UNIDENTIFIED CHAM-MWONA ARTIST

Kwandalha (Healing Vessel), mid-20th century
Gombe or Adamawa state, Nigeria
Terracotta

GIFT OF JONATHAN AND ELLEN MALTZ, BMA 2016.189
UNIDENTIFIED CHAM-MWONA ARTIST

Kwandalha (Healing Vessel), mid-20th century
Gombe or Adamawa state, Nigeria
Terracotta

GIFT OF JONATHAN AND ELLEN MALTZ, BMA 2016.190
UNIDENTIFIED KWERE OR ZARAMO ARTIST

_Shahidi wa Kaburi (Grave Witness)_,
early 20th century
Tanga or Pwani Region, Tanzania
Wood, pigment

UNIDENTIFIED DAKAKARI ARTIST

Funerary Sculpture, 20th century
Kebbi state, Nigeria
Terracotta

Gift of Geneviève McMillan in memory of Reba Stewart, BMA 2008.162
UNIDENTIFIED DAKAKARI ARTIST

Funerary Sculpture, 20th century
Kebbi state, Nigeria
Terracotta

GIFT OF GENEVIÈVE McMILLAN IN MEMORY
OF REBA STEWART, BMA 2008.163
There is something unsettling about these figures. Although they mimic the human form, their lack of facial features marks them as not of this world. And indeed, they aren’t. Each of these works was meant to carry the spirit of a deceased or yet-to-be-born human.
UNIDENTIFIED LEGA ARTIST

Iginga (Figurative Bust of the Bwami Society),
early 20th century
Maniema or Sud-Kivu province, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Ivory

GIFT OF ALAN WURTZBURGER, BMA 1954.145.97
UNIDENTIFIED LEGA ARTIST

Iginga (Figurative Sculpture of the Bwami Society), late 19th–20th century
Maniema or Sud-Kivu province, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Bone

GIFT OF BERNICE BARTH, LOS ANGELES, BMA 2000.238
UNIDENTIFIED MOBA ARTIST

Bawoong Tchitcherik (Household Shrine Figure),
mid 20th century
Northern region, Ghana or Savanna region, Togo
Wood, pigment

GIFT OF ROBERT AND MARY CUMMING, BALTIMORE, BMA 1993.595
UNIDENTIFIED MOSSI ARTIST

_Biiga (Fertility Doll)_ , 20th century
Kaya city, Centre-Nord region, Burkina Faso
Wood, leather

Gift of Geneviève McMillan in Memory of Reba Stewart,
BMA 2008.187
UNIDENTIFIED MOSSI ARTIST

Biiga (Fertility Doll), 20th century
Kaya city, Centre-Nord region, Burkina Faso
Wood, leather

GIFT OF GENEVIÈVE MCMILLAN IN MEMORY OF REBA STEWART,
BMA 2008.188
The wide, bulging eyes of these masks refer to supernatural authority and the ability of those associated with the spirit-world to see things that humans cannot. In the context of the fast-moving masquerades in which each mask was danced, these disproportionate facial features helped communicate the metaphors embedded in each work.
UNIDENTIFIED KUMU ARTIST

Nsembu (Diviner’s Mask), early 20th century
Tshopo region, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Wood, pigment

ANONYMOUS GIFT, BMA 1995.158
UNIDENTIFIED OGORI ARTIST

Mask, early 20th century
Rivers state, Nigeria
Wood, pigment

ANONYMOUS GIFT, BMA 1995.150
UNIDENTIFIED IJO OR YORUBA ARTIST

Nature Spirit Mask, early 20th century
Bayeisa, Delta, Ondo, or Rivers state, Nigeria
Wood, encrustation

GIFT OF ASIF AND JEAN SHAIKH, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND,
BMA 2005.233
UNIDENTIFIED EJAGHAM ARTIST

Emblem of the Leopard Spirit Society (Nkpa), late 20th century
Cross Rivers state, Nigeria
Reed, animal skulls (bovine, baboon, crocodile, deer, antelope, and others), grasses, leaf midrib brooms, wood, sheep and goat horns, gourd, twine, and encrustation
gift of robert and mary cumming, baltimore, bma 2002.609

The power of the Leopard Spirit Society (Ngbe)—a secret association with legislative and judicial authority—is dramatically visualized on its striking emblem (nkpa). Accumulated skulls represent the animals killed and eaten by society members, while brooms symbolize the group’s ability to sweep away harmful magic. All elements surround a central drum, which was beaten to make announcements to the community.
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