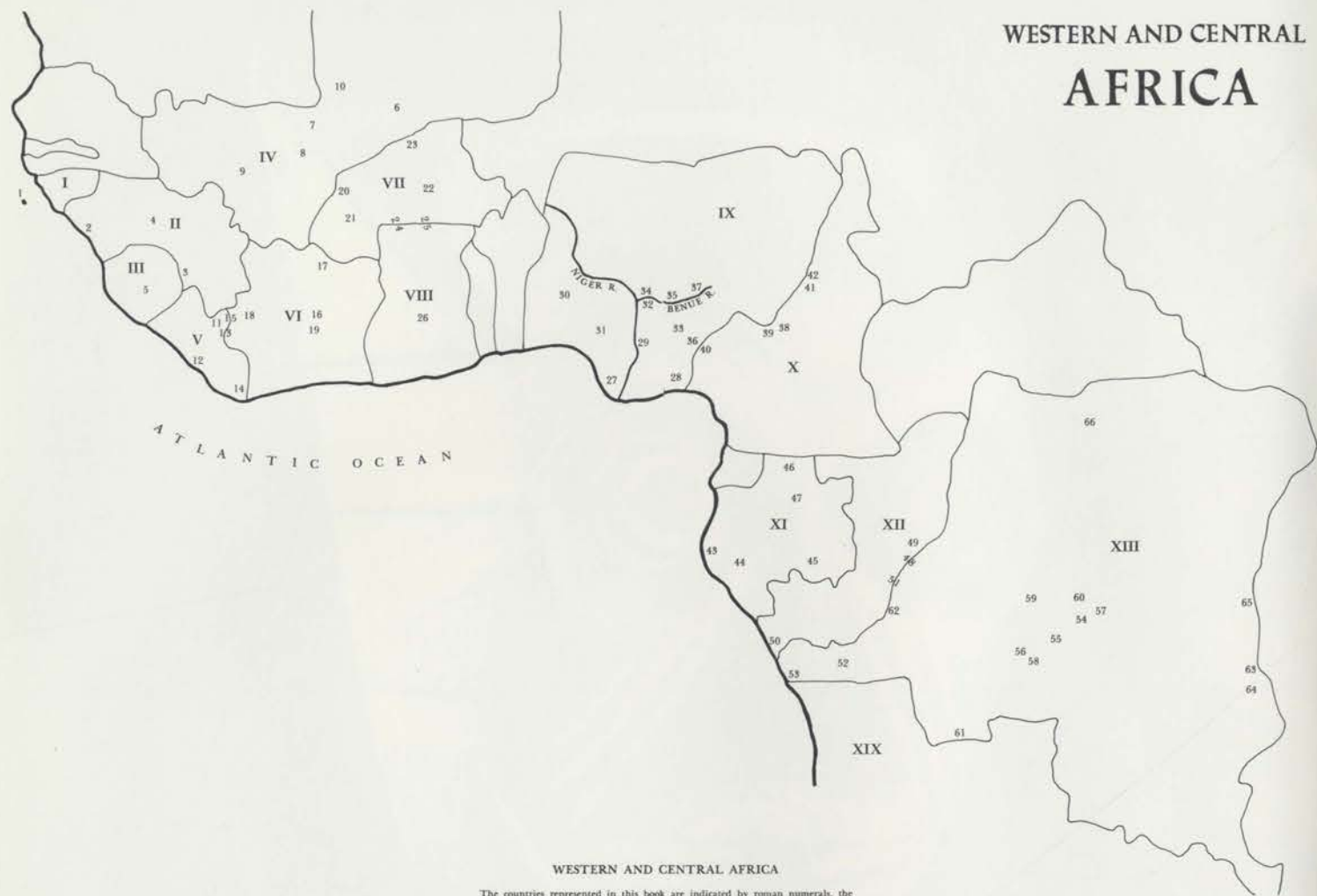


# African Art

*Selections From The Collection of  
Molly and Walter Bareiss*



## WESTERN AND CENTRAL AFRICA

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October 9 to November 7, 1986

Lecture by Dr. Robert Farris Thompson of Yale University  
October 28, 1986

### WESTERN AND CENTRAL AFRICA

The countries represented in this book are indicated by roman numerals, the tribes by arabic numerals, in the order of the plates. Variants of tribal names and related tribes are in parentheses. Tanzania and Zambia are not shown.

- |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| I. PORTUGUESE GUINEA<br>1. Bijogo (Bijogo, Bijugu)   | VI. REPUBLIC OF THE<br>IVORY COAST<br>16. Baule (Yaoure)<br>17. Senulo (Siena)<br>18. Dan (Yakouba)<br>19. Guro             | 30. Yoruba<br>31. Benin Kingdom - Bini<br>32. Idoma<br>33. Munyaye<br>34. Jompre<br>35. Igbira<br>36. Chamba<br>37. Maba              | XII. REPUBLIC OF CONGO<br>48. Kuyu (Babochi)<br>49. Bakwele (Kwele)<br>50. Bayili<br>51. Batke (Tete, Tsaye)  |
| II. REPUBLIC OF GUINEA<br>2. Baga<br>3. Toma (Nalou)<br>4. Landouma                                  | VII. REPUBLIC OF<br>UPPER VOLTA<br>20. Bwa (Bobo-Oule)<br>21. Bobo-Fing<br>22. Mossi<br>23. Korumba<br>24. Gurunsi (Grunsi) | X. REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON<br>38. Bekom<br>39. Bamum<br>40. Ekoi<br>41. Mambila<br>42. Kaka (Kaka)                                       | XIII. ZAIRE<br>52. Bakongo (Kongo)<br>53. Musongu (Solongo)<br>54. Balwa (Lwalwa)<br>55. Bapende (Pende)<br>56. Bayaka (Yaka)<br>57. Bena Bimbo<br>58. Baka (Suku)<br>59. Basonge (Songye)<br>60. Bakuba (Bushongo)<br>61. Batshioko (Batshokwe, Tshokwe)<br>62. Basulampasu (Basala Mpasu, Salampasu)<br>63. Wabembe (Bembe)<br>64. Wagoma-Babuye (Goma-Babui)<br>65. Warega (Lega, Bolega)<br>66. Ngbandi (Bwaka) |
| III. SIERRA LEONE<br>5. Mendi (Tenne, Timne)   | VIII. GHANA<br>25. Kulango<br>26. Ashanti   | XI. GABON REPUBLIC<br>43. M'Pongwe (Balumbo, etc.)<br>44. Adouma (Radouma)<br>45. Ambete (Mbete)<br>46. Fang (Pangwe)<br>47. Mahongue |   |
| IV. REPUBLIC OF MALI<br>6. Dogon<br>7. Bambara (Bamana)<br>8. Marka<br>9. Malinke<br>10. Bozo        | IX. FEDERAL REPUBLIC<br>OF NIGERIA<br>27. Ijaw (Ijo)<br>28. Ibibio (Ogboni)<br>29. Ibo                                      |   |   |
| V. LIBERIA<br>11. Guerre (Ngere)-Wobe (Ouobe)<br>12. Bassa (Basa)<br>13. Gio<br>14. Grebo<br>15. Kra |   |   |   |

Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont



## Foreword

When Lois Chazen approached me a short time ago about the possibility of showing some of my African works of art at the Bennington College Art Gallery, I was not sure whether I could go along with such a proposal. There were several reasons.

First, most of my collection is in Europe and will likely remain there until I can complete studying, cataloguing and refining the collection. Second, the fragility of many of the pieces in our Greenwich, Connecticut house was a concern. After working with Lois on a selection for the exhibition, I began to realize that we could eliminate the most fragile items and still have a group of sculptures that I hope are interesting, not just as works of art, but also as social, political and religious-mythological cult objects.

It seems to me necessary, however, to say something about why I collect African art and what criteria influences my selections.

I have been interested in contemporary art and have collected in this field since my thirteenth birthday, when my father decided to give me a Picasso print in lieu of other gifts. Involved with contemporary art for many years, one realizes the influence African art has had on artists of the last one hundred years or more. This in itself was interesting, but for many years, it kept me from collecting African art. I did not want to collect an object primarily because of its influence on artists or its importance to art history. It has to speak to me on a personal level. The very fact that African art has been influential, deterred me. This did not prevent me from looking at it whenever and wherever I had the opportunity.

I changed my mind when I realized the extraordinary creativity of the African people. Their art has a quality of expression, humor and sensitivity to the needs of the artist and his people unsurpassed in the visual arts of any other culture. I consider Western Europeans and Americans impoverished relative to the people of the so-called "Dark Continent" in this regard. Variations are endless and almost nothing is ever duplicated from one area to the other. The fact that Africans do not venerate individual artists and that age, except in the case of ceramic, stone and bronze is of little importance, appealed to me further. Another factor which draws me to African art is that it fulfills the essential needs of the individual and the tribe. The objects are in one way or another an integral part of everyday life.

Realizing these two important aspects of African art, I was then able to look at the art for itself, without concern about its importance to art history and influence on Western civilization. All the considerations that influence the collector of Western, Eastern and Far Eastern art do not disturb one's enjoyment and the process of selection when one deals with African art. As I am a collector of Greek vases, Far Eastern ceramics and illustrated books, this was a welcome change. I could then begin to collect African art and enjoy these works for themselves.

Among the items we selected, you will see relatively few relationships. If I could have drawn from my entire collection, this would be even more apparent. Certainly you can divide African art into areas: the Congo, Cameroon; or people: Dogon, Baule, etc., but you cannot demonstrate that there are true schools of art or that the artists, unknown as they may be, have lost their individuality.

African art is one of the greatest stimuli to my own imagination and creativity. Each acquisition is a new experience. Enjoyable as this may be, I would offer a word of caution to collectors. Do exercise restraint, otherwise you will soon find that there is no space in which "to live" at home.

Walter Bareiss

## Introduction



Detail of Fon Voodoo Staff Altar, "Asen" Dahomey (catalogue #19)

The Tiv people of Nigeria use a basic verb which means "to dance." This word, *vine*, unites the dance with further worlds of artistic happening. Thus a person can sometimes "dance" a top, setting the toy in motion, or "dance" a cutlass, twirling the blade artistically, causing it to glitter before the metal bites into the wood. This broad conception of the dance is widely shared in subsaharan Africa, viz. that dance is not restricted to the moving human body, but can combine in certain contexts with things and objects, granting them autonomy in art, intensifying the aliveness an image must embody to function as a work of art. Motion enlivens stillness with precisely the contrastive logic utilized by an Ngbaka sculptor in the north of Zaire, who carved a portion of a musical instrument in the form of a part of the human frame in order to add, quite literally, body to beauty in sound.

The spinning top, to return to the Tiv, and the flashing cutlass are objects invested with independent aura and importance. They are things made more impressively themselves by motion. Detachment and sharing of human vitality, involving masks, headdresses, staffs, raiment, and even pottery and furniture, classically unite the inner being of the thing with the inner being of the self. The phenomenon is, fundamentally, poetic. It is a means of gaining access to sacred worlds conjured in artistic shapes.

Africa thus introduces a different art history, a history of *danced* art, defined in the blending of movement and sculpture, textiles, and other forms, bringing into being their own inherent goodness and vitality. Dance can complete the transformation of cryptic object into doctrine; dance redoubles the strength of visual presence; dance spans time and space.

Yet the work of plastic art has a logic and a power of its own. This is especially true in Africa, where the work of art is displayed on domestic altars or within a sacred grove. Thus Basinjom, famous oracle mask of the Ejagham and Banyang people of western Cameroon remains vital even when at rest, within its private portion of the forest. This is the site where neophytes in the second grade of the cult are taught the lore that makes them effective warriors against witchcraft and, in the process of these lessons, the initiator points to various parts of the gown and mask and explains their meanings. While lessons in iconography are being given, certain men firmly place two rifles in crossed position over the image, forming an ancient Ejagham sign of arrested motion, for it is believed that unless this is done, the image may move of its own accord and create trouble. The fact that the image of Basinjom must be moored magically, when at rest, is a metaphoric statement of inherent visual aliveness . . .

The famed unity of the arts in African performance suggests a sensible approach in which one medium is never absolutely emphasized over others. Sculpture is not the central art, but neither is the dance, for both depend on words and music and even dreams and divination. Music, dance, and visual objects are all important, separate or together; and if motion conveys stature to music and art, sculpture deepens motion by condensation of several actions into one.

From the preface to *African Art in Motion*.

Robert Farris Thompson

(end notes omitted)



## Works in the Exhibition

### 1. GREBO RITUAL BOARD, LIBERIA

The reverse side of this rare, beautifully carved figure is hollow. Used as a container for ritual materials, it is held horizontally on the head. This form is unique to the Grebo people who live along the Atlantic coast. Before carving, the artist performs ritual purification rites. No one may watch him at work. As the work proceeds, the artist makes offerings to preserve his sanctified state. This male figure is fashioned to persuade the appropriate spirits to take their abode within. 36" x 11" x 7".

### 2. MITSHOGO MASK, FOREST REGION OF GABON

More than fifty types of masks have been documented from this region. Few remain because of the harsh climate, others were destroyed by missionaries. This mask is used by initiates of the Bouiti society in a ceremony known as Ghebendo, evoking spirits of dead ancestors. The triangular nose and almond shaped eyes are characteristic. The masks are danced under torchlight to give a powerful and eerie aspect to initiates who are to be protected from unfriendly spirits. The pegs on each side of the jaw once held a raffia beard. Late 19th to early 20th century. 13" x 8" x 2".

### 3. GIMBI IMPERIAL MASK, NORTHWEST PROVINCE, CAMEROON

Most important to the royalty of the area, this mask is used only once each year in the palace. "Gimbi" is vernacular of the Wum people for "guidance of the palace and saver of the village". Approximately 200 years old. 18" x 15" x 11".

### 4. BIDJOGO GUINEA BISSAU FEMALE CULT FIGURE

Known as "iran", these figures are used to communicate with ancestors. It may belong to an individual or an entire village. Offerings to the idol are appeals for bountiful crops, to ward off illnesses and to assist in settling disputes. 13" x 5" x 5".

### 5. EKOI JANUS HEAD (PROBABLY IDOMA, NIGERIA) CROSS RIVER AREA, BORDER CAMEROON

Idoma speaking people live in tiny scattered villages or large kingdoms. They believe in a Supreme Being and also practice ancestor worship. Social life centers around secret societies and dance groups. This ogline mask, used in these ceremonies, has protruding scarifications typical of the Idoma. 14" x 9" x 6".

### 6. FON WARRIOR, NIGERIA

Characteristically, King figures have arms outstretched in menacing positions. This polychromed figure in naturalistic style was completed around 1880 when the French entered Dahomey. The king is attired accordingly. Two similar important figures are in the Musée de l'Homme, Paris. 41" x 22" x 18".

### 7. LEATHER COVERED MASK, CROSS RIVER AREA, NIGERIA, BORDER CAMEROON

Rather than representing spirits, these masks indicate one of seven ranks, from messenger to the most elite group of elders. A dark face indicates a male, white or yellow, female. Emblems of power decorate the top. Approximately 50 to 100 years old. 25" x 13" x 13".



Grebo Ritual Board, Liberia  
(catalogue #1)



Yoruba Bowl on Figured Stand, Nigeria  
(catalogue #15)



Ebrie Carved Wooden Figure, Male,  
Ivory Coast near Ghana (catalogue #22)



8. ZULU TRADITIONAL NDEBELE BEADWORK APRON, MATABELELAND, WEST RHODESIA  
Various garments mark a girl's progress from child to woman. The first is made of leather with string fringes and a beaded area only at the top, "ghabi". Young maidens wear a rectangular front covering. The "jocolo" is worn for ceremonial occasions by married women. For the first seven months it is unbeaded. Then the bride's mother-in-law makes a splendid beaded version. A less formal type is called "mapoto" and this is done by the young maiden. Older aprons are sewn on leather such as this example. Some modern aprons have television antennas or light bulbs in the pattern, in areas where there is no electricity. 16" x 14".
9. IVORY CARVED TUSK (SCEPTER) CONGO  
The chief depicted at the top and the other figures at the bottom indicate its royal significance. Dates from the 18th to 19th century. Buffalo hairs were attached at the top. 14" x 4" x 2".
10. BEMBE FEMALE FIGURE, LOWER CONGO  
Figures from this region have had exceptional influence on the sculpture of neighboring groups. They are usually small, with inlaid eyes and richly decorated abdomens, burnished darkly or painted. These ancestor effigies are used by diviners, healers and exorcisors in magic rituals. 6" x 2" x 2".
11. BONE IDOL, MITOKO, NORTH CENTRAL CONGO  
5" x 2" x 2".
12. DOGON WROUGHT IRON NAIL FIGURE, MALI  
Small iron figures were generally used at shrines, sometimes symbolizing ancestors. In ceremonial rites they were sprinkled with potions of magical or religious significance. 4" x 3/4" x 3/4".
13. BAMBARA WROUGHT IRON GOAT, MALI  
Blacksmiths are given the title "nyamakala". "Nyama" means life force; "kala" means handle or staff. Blacksmiths perform circumcision, educate the young and practice divination. They are the artists who give form to nearly every aspect of life. 7" x 8" x 1".
14. WOODEN SEAT WITH FACES CARVED ON PEDESTAL, CAMEROON  
20" x 14" diameter.
15. YORUBA BOWL ON FIGURED STAND, NIGERIA  
The children of Ifá were punished because one of his sons refused to bow down before his father. Ifá withdrew to heaven and terrible droughts plagued the earth. The children of Ifá climbed the sacred palm tree to beg their father's forgiveness. Ifá gave each 16 palm nuts as symbols of his healing powers and to replace his presence on earth. Order and life were restored. The Sixteen Sacred Palm Nuts are the most ancient and important instruments of Yoruba divination. 4 1/2" x 6 1/4" diameter.
16. CARVED WOODEN WARP ROLL FOR YARN, POSSIBLY FROM GHANA  
4" x 1" x 1".
17. DAN MASK, IVORY COAST  
This typical Dan mask has an idealized; gentle face, smooth polished surfaces, slit eyes and slightly open mouth. It was used in circumcision rites. 14" x 7" x 2".
18. URHOBO WOODEN FEMALE FIGURE, NIGERIA  
The Ijo people are believed to have inhabited the Niger Delta for at least 500 years. They worship dead ancestors, "duen", dead village heroes, "am'on" and water divinities, "owaumapu". The female figure, central to earthly concerns and fertility, is intended to capture these spirits for the benefit of the community. Bared teeth indicates aggression, perhaps to ward off evil spirits. 44" x 11" x 9".
19. FON VODOO STAFF ALTAR, "ASEN" DAHOMEY  
The influence of Christian missionaries and a skill in metalwork is evident in this ritual object. The staff is carried or stuck in the ground and serves the cult of "Fa". 50" x 16" diameter at the top.
20. MOTHER WITH DEAD CHILD, LOWER SUDAN TOWARDS CAMEROON  
30" x 12" x 6".
21. a. KUBA POOM ITOK MASK, ZAIRE  
Carved at the turn of the century, this mask appears in Eliot Elisofon's book *The Sculpture of Africa* and Rene Gardi's work, *African Crafts and Craftsmen*. Extremely high quality, this mask is finely carved and has significant surface detail. The forehead is stamped "#21" and was part of the treasure of a Kuba (Bakuba) King. 15" x 8" x 3".  
b. See above (this mask not part of King's treasure)
- 22.-23. EBRIE CARVED WOODEN FIGURES, MALE AND FEMALE, IVORY COAST NEAR GHANA  
An eastern Baule group in the Ebrie lagoon area. Their style is marked by greater angularity than the more known Guro and Baule styles. Found in Obidjan in 1976.  
Male: 10" x 4" x 2".  
Female: 12" x 4" x 2".
24. IBIBIO PUPPET, CROSS RIVER REGION, NIGERIA  
This figure with movable arms represents a "fattening house" girl. Beginning May of the year in which they will be married, young maidens are secluded, kept in bed and fed rich foods. The three month process includes instruction in sexual and religious matters, and ceremonial cooking. 16" x 8" x 3".
25. MAMBILA, DOG'S HEAD WITH BRAIDED SNAKE TAIL, NORTHERN NIGERIA  
Animal effigies are used for protection; although certain ones are taboo, others are important at specific times. Taboos are inherited through the matrilineal line. Witchcraft is prevalent among these people; therefore, a number of magical objects are found in front of ancestral huts. This combination of dog and snake is a familiar one. 10" x 16" x 2".
26. NKISI VILI MIRROR FETISH, CONGO  
This figure is intended to hunt down and chase disease. Bent knees indicate vitality, the eyes sparkle with glass while healing potions are secreted in the abdomen. 15" x 6" x 5".
27. DOGON HORSEMAN, MALI  
This iron figure is used as a grave marker or to enhance altars. 7" x 6 1/2" x 3/4".
28. BAMBARA CARVED MOUSE LIZARD, MALI  
1" x 10" x 2".
29. FULANI WHISK BROOM, MALI, NIGERIA NORTHERN DISTRICTS.  
The figure at the top of this bronze and leather knife, arching, twisting and tall resembles the Fulani herdsmen. Dates from the beginning of the twentieth century. 12" x 2 1/2" x 2 1/2".
30. CAST IRON FEMALE FIGURE, PROBABLY BAMBARA, MALI  
12" x 2" x 2".
31. IGBO BOWL, ANTHROPOMORPHIC FETISH, NIGERIA  
These bowls contain sanctified water and other healing ingredients. The figure on the rim represents a regional deity who will protect the contents of the bowl and those within the house. 7 3/4" x 7" x 5".



32. ZULU WOVEN AND BEADED OBJECTS,  
SOUTHEAST AFRICA

- a. Telephone Wire Bowl - "Cingh" means telephone wire as well as telephone. Patterned after traditional palm fiber and copper weaving of South and East Africa. Tembu sub-tribe. 3 1/2" x 8" diameter.
- b. Straw Beer Lid - "Izimbenghe" woven from palm leaf strips, used as lid for pottery. Cunu sub-tribe. 2 1/2" x 7" diameter.
- c. Fringed Necklace - The Tembu subtribe uses blue and green predominantly. The glass beads are from Czechoslovakia, the larger beads, Victorian. Loose stringing enhances the swaying quality of the necklace. 15" x 4".

- d. Beaded Girdle - The colors have meaning: red, passion; blue, fidelity; green, grass; yellow, wealth; white, purity; black, strength; pink, anticipation. Zigzag patterns stand for "river of life" or lightning. The cross symbolizes the four directions and other quartering ideas. 18" x 7".
- e. Earplugs - Carved from acacia and decorated with bits of plastic and tile. Children's ears are pierced to open "the ears of the mind". The pierced ears are enlarged gradually. An adult without pierced ears is said to have the understanding of a child. 1 1/4" x 2" diameter.
- f. Bracelet 3" x 6".
- g. Fabric - two cloths in black and white patterns. 54" x 28", 58" x 34".

33. SMALL CARVED BONE STAFF, CONGO  
5" x 1" x 1".

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October 9 – November 7, 1986

Suzanne Lemberg Usdan Gallery  
Bennington College  
Bennington, Vermont 05201

Lecture by Robert Farris Thompson,  
Professor of African and Afro-American history of art at Yale University. Author of four books in the field and curator of two major exhibitions of African Art at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C. Master of Timothy Dwight College at Yale

October 28, 1986

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The Art Faculty responded to the project immediately and has done everything possible to make the idea for the exhibition, suggested by Pat Adams, a reality. I wish to thank Dr. Robert Thompson for permitting us to use excerpts from the preface to his book *African Art in Motion*. My appreciation to Leonard Kahan and Stanley Rosen for their guidance. Special thanks to John H. Williams II, Interim President, for his encouragement and support as well as to several members of the Trustee Art Committee who have made additional funds available for the exhibition, catalogue and lecture.

Lois Chazen

Front cover: *Kuba Poom Itok Mask, Zaire.*  
(catalogue #21a)

Back cover: *Gimbi Imperial Mask, Cameroon, circa 1760.*  
(catalogue #3)

