

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215 extension 224

Press Preview
Monday, January 26
noon to 5 p.m.

MAJOR AFRICAN SCULPTURE EXHIBITION OPENING AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. January 25, 1970. A presentation of masterpieces of African sculpture from the major art-producing tribes of Africa will be opened to the public Thursday (January 29) at the National Gallery of Art following three days of previews and related meetings and activities.

The landmark exhibition of 200 sculptures, from public and private collections of Europe, Africa, and North America, was assembled and documented by William Fagg, distinguished African art authority at the British Museum, London. Sponsored by the Chiefs of the Diplomatic Missions from 34 nations of Africa, it is being circulated by the International Exhibitions Foundation.

Opening week activities begin tomorrow (January 26) with a private reception and dinner at the Gallery for diplomatic representatives. On Tuesday (January 27) the Gallery will host a symposium of African art scholars from three continents sponsored by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. This symposium will be preceded by a luncheon meeting for the Association of Art Museum Directors. On Wednesday, following an afternoon invitational preview for "African Sculpture", the entire building will be open in the evening for a reception and preview for the combined national memberships of the

College Art Association and the Society of Architectural Historians.

The focus of all activity will be the African exhibition installed in the ground floor exhibition rooms of the Gallery. Among the oldest objects are majestic pieces in bronze and stone from the ancient kingdoms of Benin and Ife, the great Stone Memorial Figure from the Cross River area of Nigeria, a brass Figure of Gun from southern Dahomey, and the famed bronze Seated Figure from Tada. According to Mr. Fagg, this exemplar of "royal ease" may be "the most remarkable work of art ever found in Africa south of the Sahara."

Mr. Fagg also observes, in his informative introduction to the catalogue, that diversity between the styles of art among neighboring African tribes is often more pronounced than differences between the art of the Europeans and Chinese. In the largest gallery of the exhibition, these disparities are illustrated by some 170 wooden figures and ceremonial masks created during the last four centuries.

For example, a spherical Helmet Mask from Balubaland contrasts strikingly with the more angular forms found in the work of neighboring tribes such as the Bena Kanyoka, the Bambala, or the Bambole. Another important piece, highly unusual because it bridges this stylistic polarity, is a Basongye Face Mask. The dramatic profile of this piece illustrates one of the most inventive reconciliations of Africa's strongly individual styles.

A large map of Africa at the entrance indicates those areas which produced the pieces on view. Accompanying panels of text with life-sized color transparencies provide additional introduction.

The catalogue, which is fully illustrated in color and black and white, will be available at the exhibition entrance or by mail (\$4.95 postpaid). Free guided tours will be given daily, Tuesday

through Saturday at 1 p.m., Sunday at 2:30 p.m., by the National Gallery staff. An "Acoustiguide" tour recorded by the Gallery's Director, J. Carter Brown, will rent at the exhibition entrance for 25¢.

The concluding lectures of a special Sunday series begun in January by African art authorities will be given on February 1 and 8 in the Auditorium at 4 p.m.

The installation, designed by Kathleen Haven and Tom Flink, with the advice and assistance of Douglas Newton, Curator of the Museum of Primitive Art, New York City, is under the direction of Douglas Lewis, Curator of Sculpture of the National Gallery.

"African Sculpture" will be on view at the National Gallery through February, after which it will travel to the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, Missouri (March 21-April 26), and the Brooklyn Museum, New York City (May 16-June 21).

EVENTS SCHEDULE

Diplomatic Preview and State Dinner	January 26, 8 p.m.
Association of Museum Directors Meeting	January 27, 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
Scholars' Preview	January 27, 8 p.m.
Symposium sponsored by Kress Foundation	January 27, 9 p.m.
Invitational Preview	January 28, 3 p.m.
Reception for College Art Association and Society of Architectural Historians	January 28, 8 p.m.

FEBRUARY LECTURES

<u>African Art: History and Context</u> Guest Speaker: Roy Sieber Chairman, Department of Fine Arts Indiana University, Bloomington	February 1, 4 p.m. Auditorium
<u>Meanings in African Art</u> Guest Speaker: Daniel P. Biebuyck Chairman, Department of Anthropology University of Delaware, Newark	February 8, 4 p.m. Auditorium



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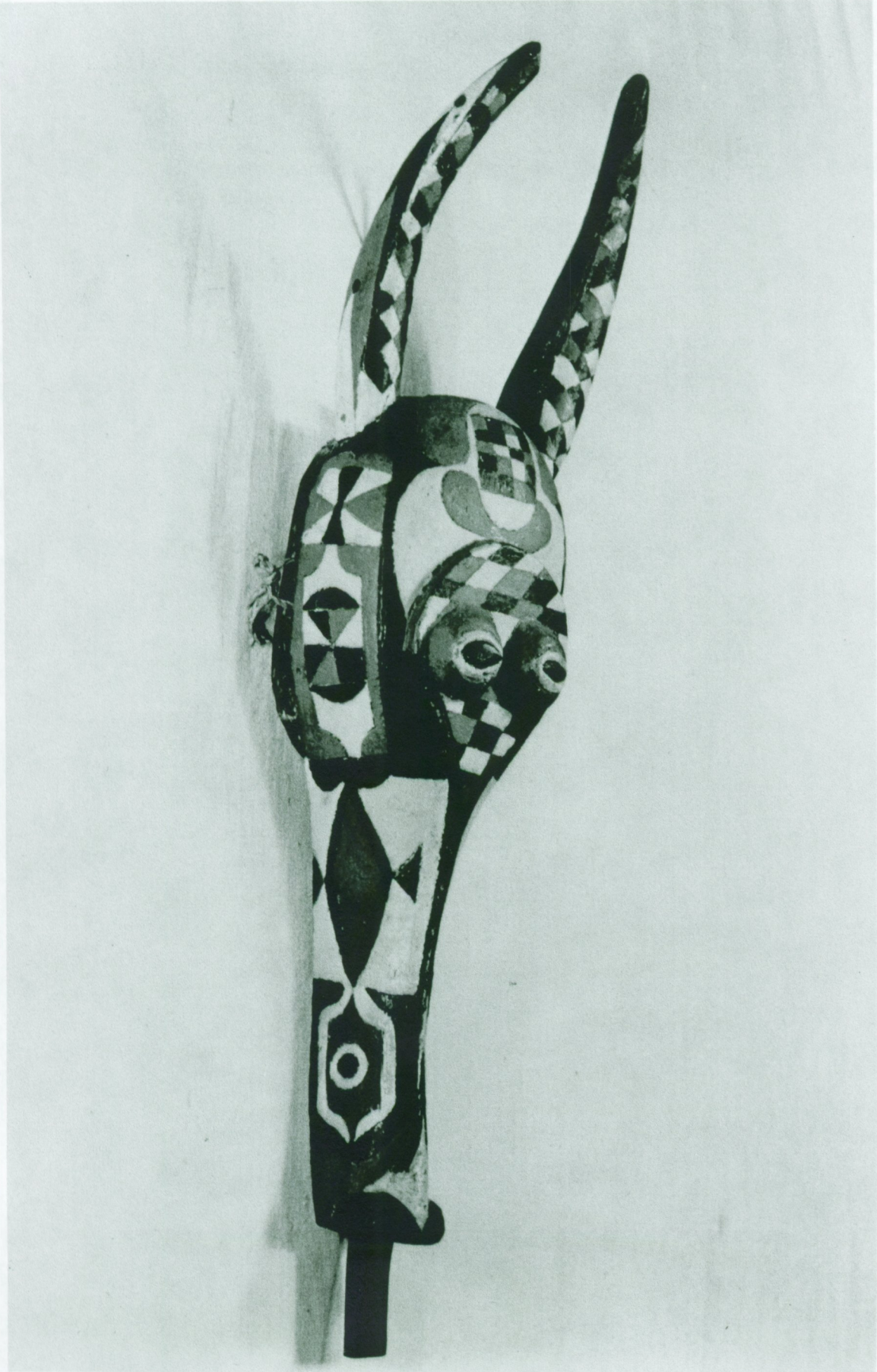
Bena Kanyoka

Figure

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Cap Mask Representing a Cow
Linden-Museum, Stuttgart



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