



## Standing Female Figure

### Date

16th to 19th century

### Primary Maker

Dogon

### Medium

Wood

### Description

This wood female figure is attributed to the Dogon culture of Mali, and although its date is unknown it is possible it was made sometime between the 16th and 19th century. The Dogon people from Mali typically create art primarily for religious purposes and are not meant to be used in public. Many Dogon sculptures carry themes of their religion or day-to-day lives, from ancestral figures to horesmen. Their art is influenced by the peoples who came before them, called the Tellem, known for their rectilinear designs. Dogon sculptures are mostly seen in the form of ancestral figure, typically found at shrines, funerals, or in the house of the Hogon, considered the head of the village. The Hogon is elected from the oldest men of the dominant lineage of the village patrilineally.

Once elected, the Hogon enters a six-month initiation

period, during which he must wear white, he cannot be touched and he cannot bathe. A pre-adolescent virgin takes care of him during the day by cleaning his house and makes his food. Once the initiation period is over, the Hogon wears a red fez cap and the virgin is replaced by a wife, who also returns home at night. The Hogon must be alone at night because the Dogon believe a sacred snake called Léb  comes during the night to clean the Hogon and transfers wisdom unto him. Amongst their sculptures, the Dogon are well-recognized for their dance masks used in their ritualistic dances within their masked dance society called 'awa.' The awa has a strict code of etiquette, obligations, and a secret language called 'sigi so.' Women and some castes are forbidden from joining and prohibited from learning 'sigi so.' There are two major events at which the awa perform with their masks, called the 'sigi' ritual and 'dama' funeral rituals. The 'sigi' is a ritual to honor and praise the first ancestors. The 'sigi' originally was meant to unite all Dogon villages, therefore involves all members of the Dogon society. The 'sigi' starts in the northeastern part of the Dogon territory where each village takes time to celebrate the ancestors by holding feasts and festivities. New masks are carved and dedicated to their ancestors. The individual village 'sigi' festivals last

for one whole year, and a new 'sigi' is started every 60 years. The 'dama' event begins immediately after the death of a person, and reoccurs years after the death. The traditional dama consists of series of dances and masquerades, and typically because the nature of the dance moves, the masks are secured onto the performers by their teeth. Due to the expense, the second traditional funeral is becoming increasingly rare. Damas today are not usually performed for their original reasons, and have become a gimmick as entertainment for tourists. The Dogon use this tourism to gain profit by charging the tourists money for not only the ritual, but also to see particular masks.

**Dimensions**

71 x 11 in. (180.3 x 27.9 cm)