

Basic Detail Report



Leg Band Currency

Date

19th Century

Primary Maker

Senufo

Medium

Bronze

Description

The participation of women within the Senufo culture is evident with this currency piece. The “Boat currency” is an anklet designed for rich women to wear during ritual dances. Senufo is a misnomer for a cultural group that lived in Mali, Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast. The society was governed by a council of elders based on a matrilineal descent. Women even took part within the secret societies of the Senufo including the Poro, Sandogo, Wambele and Typka. These societies were the religious centers of the culture, honoring natural and ancestral spirits. The Poro, in particular, was a secret masked society that was meant for men but accepted women as well. The Poro also considered the ancestress Nerejao to be the head of the secret society, governing the bridge between the ancestors and the living. Membership to the Poro was a long task of twenty years of training before one was able to take part in rituals pertaining to agriculture and funerals. The Poro were regulatory towards the Senufo, teaching young people right and wrong, unacceptable behavior, laying down cultural norms and punishing those who did not follow those rules. Like many societies in western Africa, the Senufo were once divided by social castes, known as “katioula,” according to one’s occupation. There was little movement between these groups with minimal intermarriage between them. The castes were broken into landowning farmers, artisans and craftsmen, and slaves. The blacksmiths, in particular, were revered and their works would be influential to the European scholars and artists that would witness their talent. Famous artists such as Pablo Picasso and Fernand Léger found inspiration in the avant-garde stylings of the Senufo. Though the cultural heritage of the Senufo and Poro has been diminished with the adoption of Islam in recent decades, their artistic influence lives in the works of the famous artists who came after them.

Dimensions

Overall: 4 x 8 1/8 in. (10.2 x 20.6 cm)