



Standing Male Figure

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Igbo

Medium

Wood and pigment

Description

Igbo-Ukwu, also known in the Igbo language as “Great Igbo,” is a town located south-east of the River Niger in Nigeria, Africa. The Igbo are a culture without chiefs or kings, and are known to be notoriously egalitarian with a segmentary structure of social organization. Unlike other nearby communities in Igbo-Ukwu, such as societies in Benin, status and prestige are attained by merit rather than being attributed by birth. Igbo-Ukwu is well known for their vessels, ornamental objects and sculptures. Many of these items were crafted locally, if not at Igbo-Ukwu

itself. The area was maintained a wealthy society based on countless objects discovered over the years. The economic base of the community was farming, working and iron smelting. Substantial surpluses would translate into the work of craftsmen and artists producing other objects works of art. Researchers believe Igbo art evolved from the Nri people who settled in Anambra Valley, east-central of Nigeria, with important settlements in Igbo-Ukwu and neighboring regions. Igbo-Ukwu art lessened over the years and no metal art was produced in over one-hundred years; therefore wood sculptures now constitute the most common depictions of the art mastery of the Igbo people. The sculptures on display in the John Lee Court are known to represent Igbo deities, also known as alusi. Individuals would paint and adorn the figures in a respectful matter. The wooden sculptures of the Igbo adorned both their personal and institutional shrines, called Ikengar, which represent their personal and world views. The wooden figures were customarily arranged and positioned against a shrine wall. As the number of figurines would accumulate over time, the carvings would be displayed together as a representation of the group’s force, which is highly significant in the Igbo culture. The statuaries would be repainted annually and dressed with new adornments while being displayed during the feasts and celebration, stabilizing the culture of the Igbo-Ukwu people. This figure from the Igbo people represents Eke of the Odinani religions, an Alusi, which are dieties that regulate human life. Chukwu represents a supreme being, genderless and invisible. From Chukwu comes the Chineke, which is a compound of the words chí, the divine masculine force, and ékè, the creative and divisive feminine force. According to Odinani belief, although they are considered equal, Eke came from

the hands of Chi, and Chi created the world while Eke divided it. Eke's division of the world is said to have created trickster energy that introduced death and suffering upon humanity. Eke is one's ancestral guardian spirit, and she represents the mother and greater nourishing spirit. Igbo households usually have a chi shrine on a tree, and they Igbo believe woman takes her chi shrine along with all her belongings to her matrimonial home once she is married. These shrines typically contain a plethora of the Chukwu figures.

Dimensions

Overall: 18 1/4 x 5 3/4 x 4 3/8 in. (46.4 x 14.6 x 11.1 cm)