



Spirit Figure (Ikenga)

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Igbo

Medium

Wood and paint

Description

Ikenga is a horned Alusi, spirits or deities that are worshiped in the Igbo religion in southeastern Nigeria. Ikenga is one of the most powerful symbols of the Igbo and the most common cultural artifact, who represents human success, achievement and victory. Ikenga also represents to the Igbo people that anything can be accomplished with the right hand, hence the statue typically holding a club or knife, called the aka ikengs (the ikenga hand). The left hand typically holds a small, severed human head with eyes, nose and mouth

protruding. The overall violent element of the ikenga is said to represent aggression and power. With the horned element, the ikenga is believed to be the ultimate source of strength, since the Igbo have a proverb "Ebune ji isi éjé ogụ" that translates into "the ram goes into a fight head first." This proverb inspired men to go full force into a task in order to succeed, like the ram. Ikenga statues are mostly owned by men and sometimes by women of high reputation or honor in the Igbo society. Like other Alusi figures, the Igbo believe people in possession of an Ikenga will be bestowed with wealth, fortune, and protection. The Ikenga comprises a person's spiritual activation, ancestors, and personal deity through prayer and sacrifice.

Dimensions

20 1/2 × 7 in. (52.1 × 17.8 cm)