



Bateba Phuwe Figure

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Lobi

Medium

Wood and patina

Description

This Bateba figure by the Lobi people of Burkina Faso is categorized as a Phuwe Bateba, considered an ordinary figure typically standing straight with arms down. Phuwe Bateba figures are looking forward and have a solemn expression on the face. Unlike other Bateba types, the Phuwe have a variety of functions. The Lobi are noted for their animist beliefs, which involves interaction with ancestral, foreign, old and new spirits such as the "thila," supernatural spirits. These animistic interactions take place in a thilduu, domestic shrine room, a dithil (village

shrine) and places in nature the Lobi believe spirits inhabit. To support their animism, the Lobi create many figure sculptures, recognized as living beings which are placed on the shrines dedicated to the thila. With the figures enshrined, the Lobi are able to communicate with the thila and ward off evil spirits or witches. When Lobi people convert to Christianity or Islam, they typically burn their fetish figures due to a story recorded by Christian missionaries working in Burkina Faso. The missionaries reported that an elderly man in a Lobi village once renounced the spirits in by discarding his fetishes in a nearby lake, in order to accept Christianity. As the elderly man turned his back on the lake, the fetishes lept out and onto his back to reclaim him.

Dimensions

Overall: 18 3/4 x 5 1/4 x 5 3/4 in. (47.6 x 13.3 x 14.6 cm)