



Ancestor Figure

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Hemba

Medium

Wood, cloth and leather

Description

May be from the Hemba - until recently considered a sub-style of the Luba, but now distinguished from it [Zaire-North Shamba and Maniema]. An ancestor figure was venerated by a specific clan and was maintained by its members in a funerary house or in the chief's house. The figure expresses the dependence of the world of the living on that of the dead, and is thus a funerary and religious symbol and indicates the ownership of land and the possession of social authority. Both of these are based upon the organization of clans and lineages. Many of the

figures are carved out of iroko wood, which possesses religious significance. The Luba of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are known for a harmonious artistry and their ancestor carvings. The Luba artists are said to be close in connection with magic and the spiritual realm. Used primarily for initiation rituals and medicinal, divination purposes, the characteristics of the ancestor sculptures often include intricate hair styles, slightly pointed ears, ornamental body scarification and are often very polished. The figures are generally female, as according to Luba myth the first spirit was Vilie, a female supreme being who was the founder of the Luba people, serving as the primary deity of fertility and lineage. Sculptures are typically female ancestors, deities, and also guardians. The sculptures are posed in many different ways, including standing, crouching, hands on their breasts, hands on their lower abdomen and hands lifted holding up bowls. Many Luba figures have bowls or small deposits where magic is said to be contained by the diviner.

Dimensions

Overall: 18 5/8 x 6 x 5 in. (47.3 x 15.2 x 12.7 cm)