

At home

Explore African art

Have fun!



Collecting!

Do you collect anything—stamps, coins, insects, dolls, baseball cards? How many items do you have in your collection? Where do you keep it?

Real estate developer Paul Tishman and his wife, Ruth, fell in love with African art. They liked African art so much they went to Africa in the 1970s to learn more about it. After collecting more than 500 masks, sculptures and textiles, the Tishmans needed someone to look after their art. So, they sold their collection to the Walt Disney Company.

The Walt Disney Company used this collection to inspire artists creating films and exhibitions involving Africa. Do you remember the *Lion King*? The Walt Disney Company decided in 2005 to give the collection to someone who could exhibit and take care of it. So, they gave the collection to the National Museum of African Art. This is the first major exhibition with 88 objects from a collection of 525.

Style in Art

Look at the images on this page.
Which one was not created by a Yoruba artist?

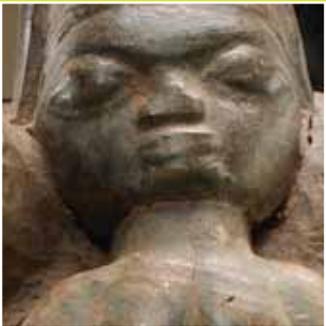
1



2



3



4

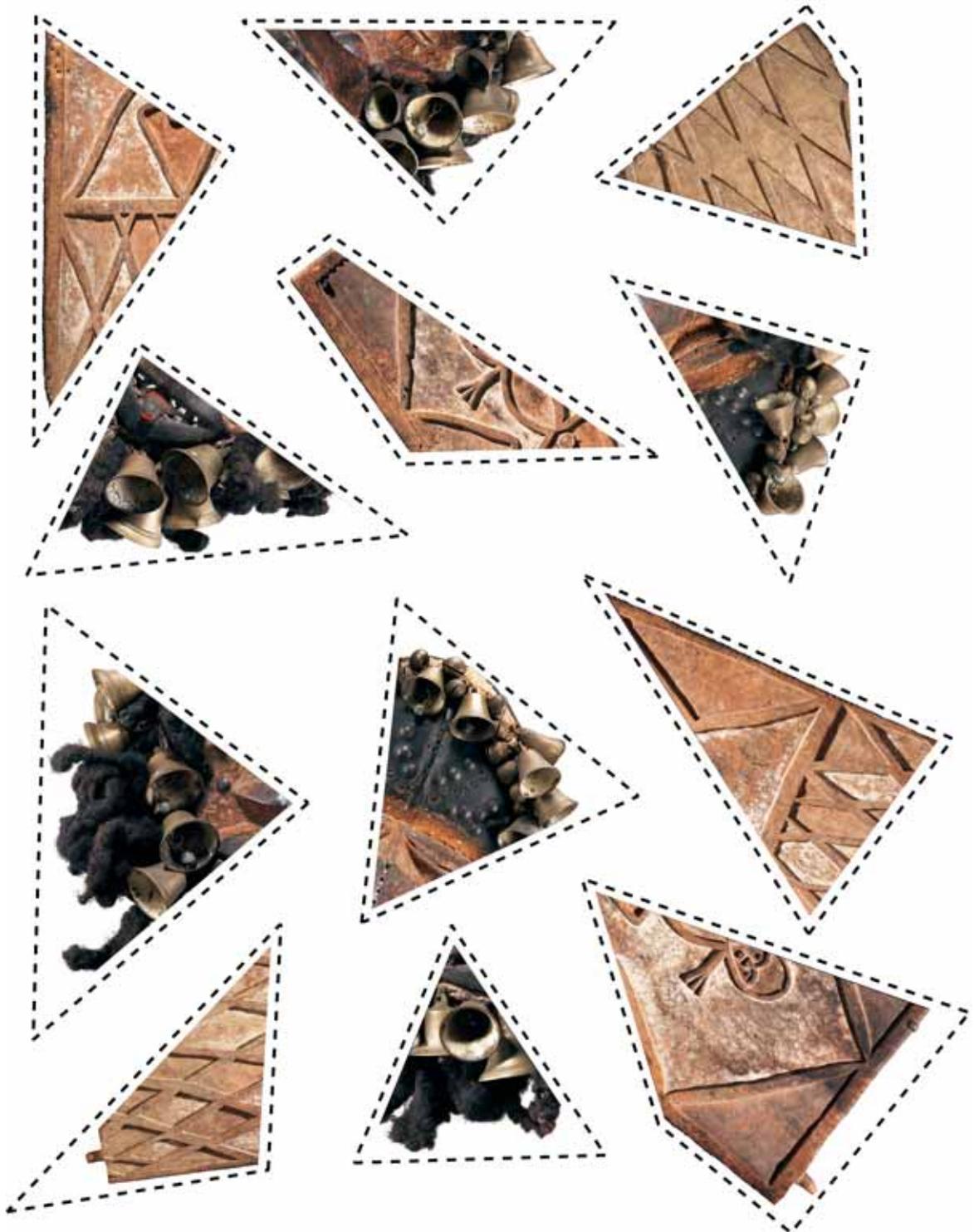


Answer

Number 2. Art historians look at the way an artist creates his or her works to determine where it comes from. Look at number 2. It is carved very differently from the other three. The Madagascar figure has deep-set eyes. The eyes on the other objects bulge out—characteristic of the art from the Yoruba peoples.

What Are We?

There are two African art works on this page. Cut close to the edge of the image and piece them together to see what they are.



Word Search

C A M E R U N E I D L O G E P
M A T D A M B A M U A D E M H
D O I V O R A I A A O I A L Y
B E D V I N M B I G E D R E S
H S U B O W U O O N A L E S I
A L O U Q R M N I G O T O O S
N T D O O W I U A J O K G C E
I S I Y F G B S D A N E U G U
N I V L E S C E H O O L N H E
E T R R X A R U O A P R S A V
B R I B R A K R O T N E T N A
M A E D E I E C U K E G L A N
C H E E S M L R A N D I O M K
D O L A A J E N I N T E N D A
O L S C A M M E A Y R O V I L

Areogun *a Yoruba artist*

Artist *person who creates works of art such as sculptures, paintings, textiles, etc.*

Bamum *peoples living in Cameroon*

Benin *kingdom in Nigeria (there is also a country called Republic of Benin)*

Cameroon *country in west Africa*

Dogon *peoples living in Mali*

Eshu *trickster god of the Yoruba*

Ivory *tusk of an elephant sometimes carved by African artists*

Ivri *type of sculpture made by the Isoko artists of Nigeria*

Madagascar *large island off the southeastern coast of Africa*

Nigeria *country in west Africa*

Nuna *peoples living in Burkina Faso*

Sculpture *work of art in three dimensions*

Shango *Yoruba god of thunder*

Wood *material used by African artists to create sculptures*

Yoruba *peoples living in Nigeria*

Spot the Differences

Look carefully at the images. The left one is the original image. The right one has been altered. Compare the doors and circle the changes. You should find seven alterations.

A wealthy and powerful person of the Poro initiation society commissioned this elaborate door from a Senufo sculptor. It was carved from a single piece of wood.



Look carefully at the images. The top one is the original image. The bottom one has been altered. Compare the masks and circle the changes. You should find 10 alterations.

This mask depicts a butterfly, one of a cast of masquerade characters, and a representation of a bush spirit. Butterflies signal the coming of rain and the start of the farming season. Notice the small birds and chameleons on the upper edge of the mask.



Exploring Art and Science

This crest mask, which supports the power of the king, has some very interesting features. Among them an intriguing material on the eyes. Museum records mentioned that it was part of a spider's nest. That information raised even more questions.

- Does a spider build a nest?
- What kind of spider?
- Where does it live?
- Why was this material used on a mask?

This spider is known as a Cameroon brown spider and belongs to the tarantula family. It builds its den on the ground near a tree. In Cameroon, it is known as *ngam*, a sacred earth spider with supernatural wisdom.

That explains why such spiders are used in divination—a process of solving special problems. And why spiders appear in works of art. Knowledge of art and science help us understand this mask better.



By looking through a powerful microscope, Dr. Johnathan Coddington, entymologist, determined the material was a spider's web or sheath, which the spider wove to protect its den.



Close-up of the spider sheath



Heteroscodra crassipes, or otherwise known as Hysterocodra crassipes (actual size)



To do

There is another very famous little spider—known as Anansi—from the Asante peoples of Ghana. Check your school or local library for books about Anansi (see Further Reading).

Odd One Out

One of the images is unlike all the rest. Which one? Why?

1



2



3



4



Answer

All but number 4 have multiple faces. Number 4 has a single face. The masks with multiple face sometimes represent twins or male and female pairs.

Further Reading

You will enjoy reading these books about Africa, which you can find in your local libraries.

A Is for Africa

By Ifeoma Onyefulu
New York: Cobblehill Books, 1993

A photographic ABC

African Animals ABC

By Philippa-Alys Browne
San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995

An introduction to some of Africa's unique animals

Africa Is Not a Country

By Margy Burns Knight and Mark Melnicove,
illustrated by Anne Sibley O'Brien
Brookfield, CT: Millbrook Press, 2000

A survey of contemporary Africa through the activities of children

Ananse's Feast: An Ashanti Tale

Retold by Tololwa M. Mollel,
illustrated by Andrew Glass
New York: Clarion Books, c. 1997

Ananse invites a turtle to a feast he cannot touch.

Anansi Does the Impossible

Retold by Verna Aardema,
illustrated by Lisa Disimi
New York: Aladdin Books, 2000

Anansi gets the stories from the Sky God.

Ebele's Favorite: A Book of African Games

By Ifeoma Onyefulu
London: Frances Lincoln, 2001

A variety of children's games from Nigeria

The New King

By Doreen Rappaport,
illustrated by E. B. Lewis
New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1995

Rakoto, a young heir to the throne, deals with the unexpected death of his father. The story includes a well-known tale about life and death from Madagascar.

Traveling Man: The Journey of Ibn Battuta 1325–1354

By James Rumford
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001

This uniquely illustrated story chronicles the journeys of the famous Moroccan-born traveler Ibn Battuta.

Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale

Retold by Verna Aardema
New York: Dial Press, 1975

This award-winning book explains a natural phenomenon—the why of a mosquito's buzz.

Credits

p18 | Armlet
Yoruba peoples, Owo region, Nigeria
16th to 18th century
Ivory
2005-6-7.2, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p18, 20 | Male figure (detail)
Yoruba peoples, Nigeria
Date unknown
Terracotta
2005-6-73, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p20 | Funerary sculpture (detail)
Sakalava or Bara peoples, Madagascar
Early to mid-20th century
Wood, pigment, metal
2005-6-4, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p20 | Bowl with lid (detail)
Artist: Attributed to Areogun of Osi-Ilorin (1880–1954)
Yoruba peoples, Ekiti region, Nigeria
Early 19th to mid-20th century
Wood, pigment, iron
2005-6-68, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p20 | Divination board (detail)
Yoruba peoples, possibly Owo region, Nigeria
Late 19th to early 20th century
Wood
2005-6-69, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p21 | Mask
Wee peoples, Côte d'Ivoire
Late 19th to mid-20th century
Wood, pigment, brass tacks, bells, metal, cloth, hair, teeth
2005-6-57, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p21 | Door
Tsogo peoples, Ogowe River region, Gabon
Late 19th to early 20th century
Wood, pigment, iron nails, plant fiber
2005-6-100, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p24 | Door
Workshop of Yalokone
Northern Senufo peoples, Boundiali, Côte d'Ivoire
1920s
Wood, iron
2005-6-6, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p25 | Mask
Nuna peoples, Burkina Faso
Mid-20th century
Wood, pigment, metal
2005-6-47, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p26 | Mask
Bamum peoples, Grassfields region,
Pa Nje village, Cameroon
Late 19th to early 20th century
Wood, horn, plant fiber, spider silk
2005-6-95, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p26 | Dr. Jonathan Coddington, National Museum of Natural
History, Smithsonian Institution
Photograph by Stephanie Hornbeck, NMAFA Conservation
Archives, 2006

p26 | Spider sheath of *Heteroscodra crassipes*
Photograph by Stephanie Hornbeck, NMAFA Conservation
Archives, 2006

p26 | Photograph courtesy of Rick West, 2006

p27 | Mask
Attributed to Takim Eyuk (died c. 1915)
Akparabong peoples, Cross River region, Nigeria
c. 1900–15
Wood, skin, dye, iron
2005-6-92, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p27 | Mask
Baule peoples, Côte d'Ivoire
Late 19th to early 20th century
Wood, cloth, string
2005-6-61, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p27 | Mask
Idoma peoples, Nigeria
c. 1950
Wood, paint, fur, iron nails
2005-6-89, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company

p27 | Mask
Bassa peoples, Liberia
Late 19th to early 20th century
Wood, bone, iron
2005-6-54, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of
The Walt Disney Company



Smithsonian
National Museum of African Art

