

Family Guide



EARTH MATTERS

Land as Material and Metaphor
in the Arts of Africa

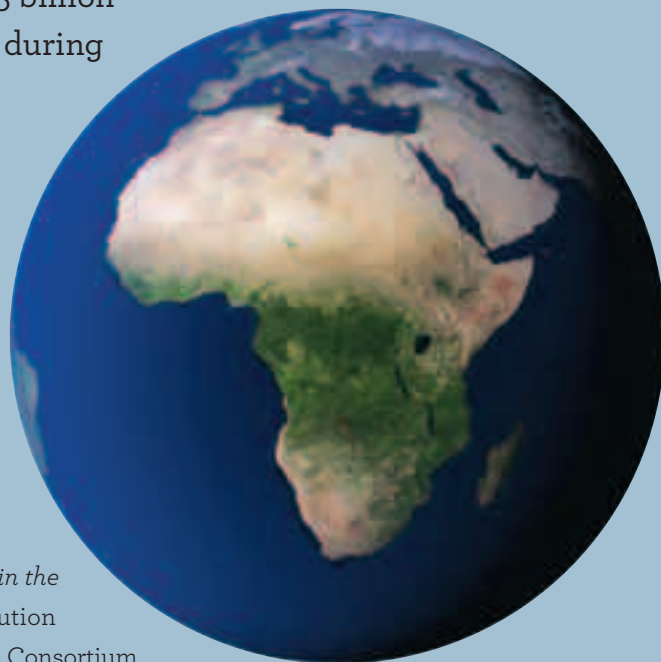
National Museum of African Art
Smithsonian Institution

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Look down at your feet. Ever wondered what you're standing on? Or what the earth is made of? Lend your imagination to this exploration of how Africa's artists and communities have used the land and its resources as inspiration.

To begin...

Geologists estimate the *earth* is more than 4.5 billion years old and has gone through many changes during that time.



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The National Museum of African Art partnered with curators, educators and scientists at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, National Museum of American History, National Museum of Natural History, the Smithsonian Conservation and Biodiversity Institute, the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, the Smithsonian Gardens, the Smithsonian Global Earth Observatory, NASA, US Botanic Garden, US Department of Agriculture, MDA Information Systems, and the Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital.

Deborah Stokes, educator

Karen Milbourne, curator

Migs Grove, editor

Lisa Buck Vann, designer

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COVER
GEORGE OSODI
B. 1974, NIGERIA
DE MONEY SERIES NO. 1 (DETAIL)
2009
FUJI CRYSTAL ARCHIVAL PRINT
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART,
MUSEUM PURCHASE, 2011-16-1

ABOVE
COURTESY NASA

Let's start looking and unearth some new ideas!



Canary Islands (Spain)

Morocco

Tunisia

Algeria

Libya

Egypt

Western Sahara

Mauritania

Mali

Niger

Sudan

Eritrea

Cape Verde

The Gambia

Senegal

Guinea-Bissau

Bissagos Island

Guinea

Burkina Faso

Ghana

Benin

Nigeria

Chad

Central African Republic

South Sudan

Ethiopia

Djibouti

Sierra Leone

Liberia

Equatorial Guinea

São Tomé and Príncipe

Cameroon

Gabon

Congo

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Uganda

Kenya

Rwanda

Burundi

Seychelles

Somalia

EQUATOR

Cabinda (Angola)

Angola

Tanzania

The Comoros

Malawi

Madagascar

Mauritius

Réunion (France)

Atlantic Ocean

Zambia

Zimbabwe

Mozambique

Namibia

Botswana

Swaziland

South Africa

Lesotho

Indian Ocean

Material Earth

What does the word *earth* mean to you?
Clay? Sand? Grass? How about salt?

The earth's surface—it's rocky crust—is largely made of oxygen, silicon, aluminum, and iron.

Find examples of these earthen materials in the exhibition.

salt

sand

ash

mud

clay

The earth, its minerals and natural materials, can contain many colors.

Can you spot these colors of the earth in this sculpture?

black

(decayed plant substance)

white kaolin

(a kind of chalk)

red camwood

(a shrublike tree for red dye)

gray iron

(hand-forged blades)



YOMBE ARTIST, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO, ANGOLA, AND REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
NKISI NKONDI (POWER OBJECT)
19TH CENTURY
AFRICAN TEAK (CHLOROPHORA EXCELS), METAL, FEATHERS, PIGMENTS, EARTH, GLASS, TEXTILES, MIRROR, CLAWS
MUSÉE ROYALE DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE, Tervuren, Belgium EO.O.O.22438

Bogolan cloth is an artistic tradition from the country of Mali.

The Bamana word *bògòlanfini* means *bogo*, “earth” or “mud”; *lan*, “with” or “by means of,” and *fini*, “cloth.”

RIGHT
NAKUNTE DIARRA
B. C. 1939, KOLOKANI, MALI
BOGOLAN CLOTH (MUD-DYED CLOTH; DETAIL)
1992
MUD, COTTON
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART,
ANONYMOUS GIFT, 2012-9-1

BELOW
ANDREW PUTTER
B. 1965, SOUTH AFRICA
HOTTENTOTS HOLLAND: FLORA CAPENSIS 2
2008
ARCHIVAL PIGMENT INK ON COTTON
RAG PAPER
PHOTOGRAPHY AND COMPOSITING:
TONY MEINTJES
FLOWER ARRANGING: CHRISTOPHER PETER
COURTESY MICHAEL STEVENSON GALLERY

Look
around the
gallery to find
this painted
cloth



A still life is an arrangement of everyday objects, such as fruit or flowers, used as subjects in drawings, paintings, and photographs.

Find a still life.

Think about how the artist collected and used the plants in this image to symbolize South Africa’s history.

Visit the National Museum of Natural History’s exhibition *The Mud Masons of Mali* to learn more about hand building structures in West Africa with earth.



Power of the Earth

A **sculpture** is a three-dimensional (height + length + depth) work made by carving, modeling, or welding hard materials like wood, metal, stone, pottery, bone, and ivory into works of art.



African artists often add mixtures of plants and medicinal material to their sculptures over time. Soil taken from places such as a village's first establishment or site, an ancestor's grave, or from an anthill located at the center of an important field are charged with history, stories, and memories. Artists use them to communicate ideas about strength and energy.

Do you have a prized possession that reminds you of a powerful story? Share your story with your group.

Can you find this object by an artist from Gabon?

Which words describe these works to you?

private

peaceful

caring

healing

mysterious

beautiful

Look carefully to find these materials



feathers

elephant hair

glass beads

animal fur

LEFT
PUNU ARTIST, GABON
RELIQUARY ENSEMBLE: FEMALE
HALF-FIGURE
19TH CENTURY
WOOD, KAOLIN PIGMENTS, HIDE, VEGETABLE FIBER, RELICS, ORGANIC MATTER
MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY, PARIS, FRANCE,
71.1943.0.433

ABOVE
TEKE ARTIST, REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
BUTI OR NKIBA (HEALING FIGURE)
MID-20TH CENTURY
WOOD, PIGMENT, CLOTH, ENCRUSTATION,
ELEPHANT HAIR
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART,
BEQUEST OF ELIOT ELISOPON, 73-7-399

Imagining the Underground

Creatures that can move, tunnel, hibernate, and live both underground and on the earth's surface are symbols of transformation and extraordinary ability.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
EDO ARTIST, BENIN KINGDOM
COURT STYLE, NIGERIA
PLAQUE
MID-16TH TO 17TH CENTURY
COPPER ALLOY
FIELD MUSEUM, CHICAGO, #8259



BAMUM ARTIST, GRASSFIELDS
REGION, CAMEROON
HELMET MASK
MID-20TH CENTURY
WOOD
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART,
GIFT OF WARREN M. ROBBINS, 76-57-1

OUATCHI ARTIST, TOGO
FIGURATIVE POT
EARLY 20TH CENTURY
TERRACOTTA
AFRIKA MUSEUM, BERG EN DAL,
THE NETHERLANDS, 599-4

What have you found while digging in the ground or at the beach? Share it with your group.

Can you find . . .

snake

mudfish

spider

Did you notice that the National Museum of African Art is 96% underground?

Strategies of the Surface

A **landscape** is a scenic view depicting natural features like the sky, mountains, trees, deserts, and rivers.

Find three different landscapes with

river

palm
tree

sand



Postcards make landscapes easy to carry or mail to family and friends. Like photographs, they remind us of places we have visited and help us hold onto memories.

Imagine taking a walk through this landscape.

Which words describe this scene to you?

quiet pleasant frightening
worried relaxed lonely

Imagine a place you would like to visit. Describe it to your group.

Find a landscape painting that has a big blue sky





ABOVE
POSTCARDS OF EGYPT
C. 1925

LEFT TO RIGHT
GENERAL VIEW OF THE PYRAMIDS, CAIRO
EEPA 2001-001-4076

THE PYRAMIDS AT GHIZEH
EEPA 2001-001-4226

THE PASSENGER IN THE DESERT
EEPA 2001-001-1887

STEPHEN GRANT POSTCARD COLLECTION
ELIOT ELISOFON PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES,
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART

OPPOSITE
IBA N'DIAYE
1928-2008, SENEGAL
SAHEL
2001
OIL ON CANVAS
COURTESY MADAME FATOUMATA SOW DIOP
COLLECTION, DAKAR, SENEGAL

ABOVE RIGHT
MBUTI ARTIST, ITURI FOREST,
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
PAINTED BARK CLOTH (DETAIL)
MID-20TH CENTURY
BARK, PIGMENT
FELIX COLLECTION



This Mbuti bark cloth is reported to be a map of life in the forest. The drawings represent *landmarks* such as waterways, forest clearings, hunting areas, and camp.

Maps can contain easily recognizable landmarks that we use for giving directions or can help guide us to and through unfamiliar places.

Environmental Action

An **abstract** work of art can use the elements of form, texture, color, and line to create a composition that doesn't look like what it represents in the natural world.

What words would you choose to describe this work:

towering

jagged

rough

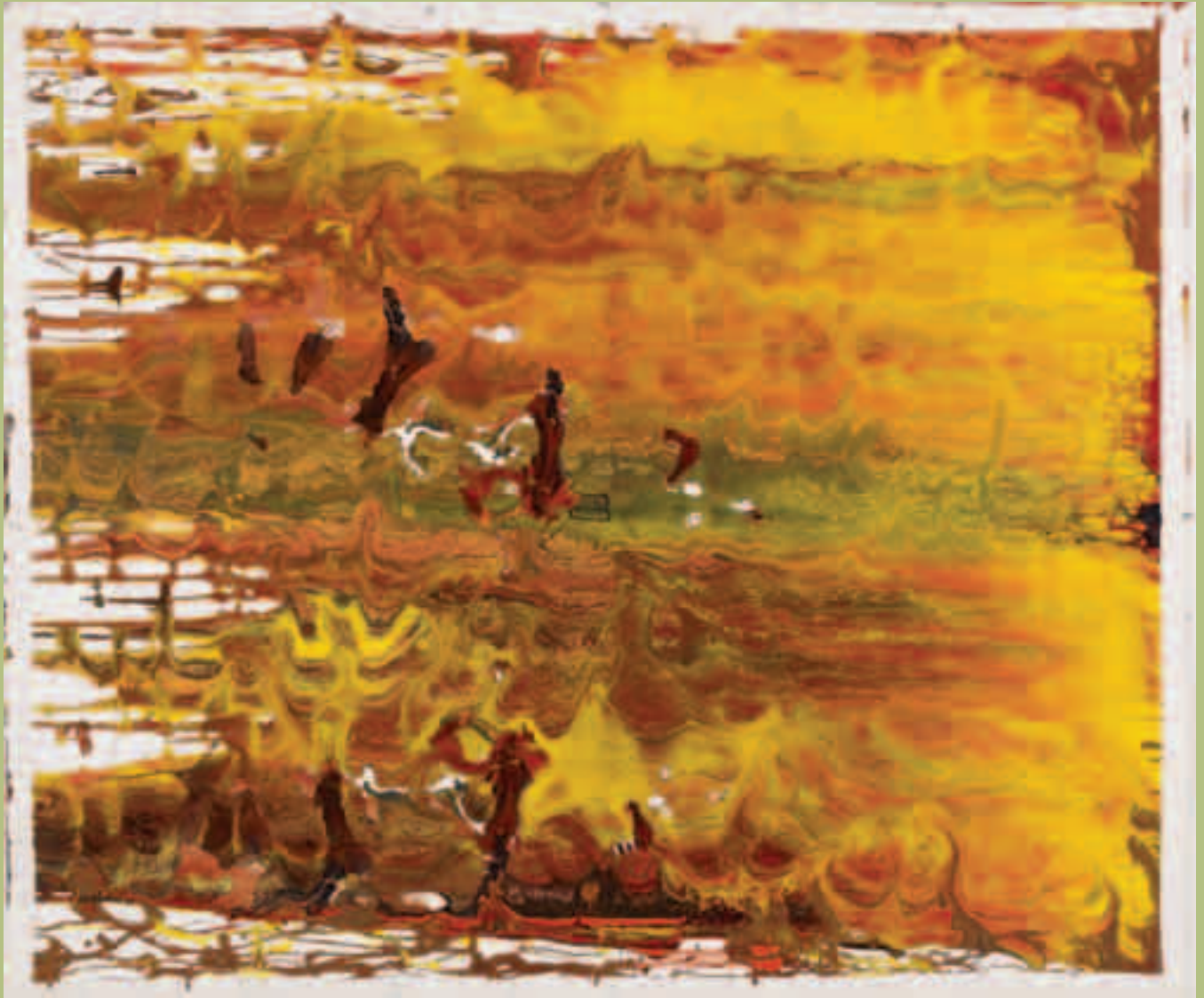
smooth

destructive

resilient

Look for a wood sculpture carved with a chainsaw.






OPPOSITE
EL ANATSUI
B. 1944, GHANA
EROSION
1992
WOOD, PAINT, WOOD CHIPS, SAWDUST
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART,
MUSEUM PURCHASE, 96-36-1

ABOVE
JERRY BUHARI
B. 1959, NIGERIA
FALL AND SPILL HISTORY
2005
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, LEAVES
COLLECTION OF LINDA LAWRENCE,
SALINA, KANSAS

Before you leave the gallery, locate an abstract painting that looks like the artist spilled something on the canvas. What does it make you think about?

*Can you find
the white
footprint?*

*Choose the work you
liked best in the exhibition.
Explain your choice to your group.*



Visit the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center at www.serc.si.edu for information about nature and ecology programs, and a tree-banding project with students in Gabon.

Did you miss something in the exhibition?

Want to find out more?
Stop by the Discovery Room
and *make your mark!*

You don't have to see everything at one time... visit the museum again and again or view it online at africa.si.edu.



Smithsonian
National Museum of African Art

africa.si.edu