

Introduction

Discover the world of Africa’s artistic history from 1000 years ago to the present day. Explore the sub-Saharan African kingdoms and learn about how certain materials, objects, and animals represent the power of kings and queens.

Follow our crocodile mascot 🐊 to learn by looking closely at the artworks and discovering fun facts along the way!

Let’s begin!



Words to know

- Al-Sadu:** A Bedouin weaving and embroidery technique of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These textiles are distinguished by their colourful patterns, which use raw materials and wool sourced locally from the environment.
- Artisan:** A worker who practices a trade or handicraft.
- Antelope:** A deer-like animal with curved horns.
- Ci-wara:** A magical creature, part-human and part-antelope, which taught the Bamana peoples how to farm the land and grow food.
- Hausa:** An ethnic group of people who live in northern Nigeria and nearby areas.
- Iyoba:** Meaning “queen mother”, it was the title bestowed on the mother of the Edo king (*oba*).
- Itrokwu society:** In Igbo culture, a group of people responsible for helping the chief to rule the community.
- Yam:** A root vegetable, like a sweet potato.

Ethnic: Relating to a group of people differentiated from other groups because they share commonalities such as culture, traditions, language, history, and food.

1

Equestrian figurine

In West Africa, horses were symbols of speed and power. The horse in kingdoms like Ghana and Mali helped the cavalry win battles by making them faster than foot soldiers.

Brought in by trade, horses were rare, and only the wealthy could afford them.

Look closely at the details of the horse and notice its decorative carvings. Why do you think the owner wanted his horse decorated?

Equestrian figurine, Bamana, Mali, Ségou region, Ségou-Koro, 19th century, wood, Gift of Mr Croll, 71.1933.57.3, Paris, musée du quai Branly- Jacques Chirac, © musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Claude Germain



2

Altar sculpture of a rooster

Iyoba Idia was a brave leader who fought as a warrior for her son, Oba Esigie.

She was honored for her courage by the placement of copper rooster statues within her palace, symbolising strength, leadership, and protection. They were also set on the King's altar to represent her bond with her son, Oba Esigie.

Which animal would you choose to symbolise bravery and leadership - and why?

Altar sculpture of a rooster, Edo, kingdom of Benin, Nigeria, 18th century, copper alloy, Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, LAD 2012.113 © Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi / Photo Thierry Ollivier



3

Ci wara kun zoomorphic crest mask

The **Ci wara** mask features a half-man, half-antelope figure, showing the connection between humans and nature.

The **antelope** represents strength, speed, and grace, qualities important for a good harvest. These masks were worn during farming festivals.

Ci wara kun zoomorphic, crest mask, Bamana • Mali, First half of the 20th century, wood, Gift of Guro Sow, Paris, musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, 75.15439 © musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo, Patrick Gries, Bruno Descoings



4

Akatahounto drum

These drums come from the kingdom of Danhomè (modern-day Benin), and were used to celebrate the **yam** harvest festival with music and dance. Master **artisans** designed these drums with animal symbols to represent the qualities of kings.

Can you think of any agricultural festivals celebrated in the UAE?

(Liwa Date Festival)

Akatahounto drum, Djotohou, Houeglo, and Hountovo families, Fon, Benin, Abomey, second half of the 19th century, wood, animal hide, pigments, Paris, musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, 71.1935.54.103 © musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Patrick Gries/Bruno Descoings



Activity

Use the space below to write about or sketch something you have seen today.

5 Fan

In **Hausa** culture, kings and leaders used fans as a symbol of power and social importance.

Objects of power were decorated with images of fierce and dangerous animals like lions, leopards, crocodiles and tarantulas to represent strength and leadership.

If you were to design a symbol of power, what would it be?



Fan, Hausa, Niger, early 20th century, sheepskin, gift of Ms Arsandaux, Paris, musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, 71.1949.20.8
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac



Beaded hat, Yoruba, Nigeria, Oyo state, Osogbo, 20th century, multicoloured glass beads, fabric, Gift of Michel Chambaud, Paris, musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, 70.2023.16.1
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Pauline Guyon

7

Musa I's pilgrimage to Mecca

The artist Louis Barthélemy and Tarek El Safty created an artwork about the journey of Mansa Musa, the king of the Mali Empire, who was known for his great wealth and generosity.

This picture shows the king's famous trip to Mecca in 1324, one of the most important events in history.

He carried a great deal of gold to cover his travel expenses on this journey, to impress the people he met and gifted the gold to the rulers of Cairo.

Look closely at the scene—what details can you see that show the king's wealth and kindness?



Louis Barthélemy, (1988, Lyon, France), and Tarek El Safty, (1956, Cairo, Egypt), *Musa I's pilgrimage to Mecca*, 2023 • wall hanging with three scenes, cotton appliques, collection of the artist, Cairo
© Louis Barthélemy © Tarek El Safty. Photo Ayman Lotfy pour la "Ubuntu Gallery

8

Zoomorphic mask

In Igbo culture, a special group called the **Itrokwu society** used an elephant mask to show authority and power.

The mask was worn during tax collection, reminding people to follow the rules and respect their leaders.

Why do you think the elephant was chosen as a symbol of power?



Zoomorphic mask, Oba, Idoma, Nigeria, Benue region, Otobi, before 1990, wood, pigments, provenance: former collection of Monique and Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller, Paris, Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, 73.1996.1.75
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Sandrine Expilly

9

Chief's stool

The chief's stool from Cameroon's Grassland region was used by kings to show power during ceremonies. It is decorated with wild animals to highlight strength, and patterns to represent culture and nature.

Take a moment to compare the shapes and patterns you see in the designs of the stool to those of the Al-Sadu textiles of Emirati culture. Can you find any similarities?



Chief's stool, Bamileke, Cameroon, early 20th century, wood, glass beads, fabric, Paris, musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, 75.12059
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Pauline Guyon

10

Stool

The **Yoruba** people created a special wooden stool showing men and women celebrating together. It was used for dignitaries and local cult celebrations.

Did you notice how the stool's base has a snake carved into it? In Yoruba culture, snakes, especially pythons, are symbols of wisdom.



Nago / Yoruba, Benin, Porto-Novo, c. 1885, wood, pigments, gift of Édouard Foa, Paris, musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, 71.1891.22.1
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Thierry Ollivier, Michel Urtado

11

El Anatsui

Ghanaian artist El Anatsui creates large sculptures from recycled metals, such as bottle caps. Inspired by royal fabrics and the passage of time, he transforms "waste" materials into colourful, shiny artwork that tells new stories.

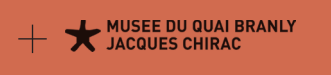
What if you could take old toys, pieces of paper, or broken buttons that are usually thrown away. How would you use your creativity to turn them into something fun and new?



El Anatsui, (1944, Anyako, Ghana), *Detsi*, 2008–2021, aluminium and copper, Dubai, Efié Gallery
Courtesy de l'artiste et Efié Gallery, Dubai

Kings and Queens of Africa: Forms and Figures of Power

Young Visitor's Guide



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