

TITLE: *Baga Elek (Anok) Carved Wood Altar Head*

ARTIST: Baga Tribe of Guinea

DATE: Unknown

SIZE: 47" x 27" x 7.5"

MEDIUM: Hardwood Sculpture

ACQUISITION #: 2006.21 a, b, c

ADDITIONAL WORKS BY ARTIST IN COLLECTION? YES_NO_X_



Map of Guinea and map of Guinea in Africa

Baga People

The Baga people migrated during the 15th and 16th centuries from the Sudan area to Guinea and Guinea-Bissau on the west coast of Africa. They have rich spiritual traditions that can be seen in their art-work and sculpture-making. However, much tradition changed when Islam was introduced to the community. Sixty thousand people make up the Baga tribe who live in small villages in the northern part of Guinea and on the coast. The Baga live in family units with an elderly man as the head. In the Baga communities men fish, and grow cola nuts (the main ingredient in soda that grows on the cola nut tree in Africa), while women grow rice.



Contextual Information

Anok sculptures, also called Elek, are bird-shaped shrine heads with human features. These sculptures were used during harvest times to protect the communities' food from evil spirits and sorcery. Anok sculptures were also used during funeral processions, where they protected the spirits of the bodies into the afterlife. Every Baga family displays an Anok sculpture in their home. The sculpture represents the lineage or ancestors of that family, and protects that lineage. The Anok sculpture is the centerpiece of the family shrine. Included in the shrine with the sculpture are collected natural objects: dead scorpions and crab's jaws, twigs and stones, and reddened bark, dyed using cola nuts. One object seems even more unusual—a fly swatter. These objects join with the Anok sculpture to protect the family.

In addition, the sculptures are used by the Simo Society of the Baga tribe, a secret society. They use the sculptures during purification ceremonies, typically understood as a means to rid the tribe or individuals of negative forces. Such secret societies are not unique to the Baga tribe but many African secret societies remain "secret." This means they will not generally reveal parts of rituals to non-members. Or it may mean only members know who are members of the society.

Media Description

Anok sculptures are made out of hardwood. They are smaller works than the majority of sculptures created by the Baga tribe. The sculpture consists of two pieces. The main piece, the head, is inspired by a bird's head, but has human features. The head is hollow. Small horns (missing from the mask at FSU), filled with a magical substance, fit through a lozenge, a diamond-like shape, on the head. The head sits on the second part of the sculpture, a pedestal. The head can be lifted out of the pedestal if desired.

Glossary

Lozenge: A four-sided planar figure with a diamond-like shape.

Sorcery: the art, practices, or spells of a person who is supposed to exercise supernatural powers through the aid of evil spirits.

Lineage: the line of descendants of a particular ancestor.

Resources

http://www.randafricanart.com/Baga_Bansonyi_serpent.html

<http://www.zyama.com/baga/pics.htm>

Warding Off Disaster in Tallahassee, Activity Lesson Plan: K – 5



Session Activity: Bird and human characteristics intertwine in the Anok sculptures of the Baga Tribe. In this activity students will create an Anok sculpture which combines bird features with representations of themselves. Prior to discussion, questions include “Which bird would you choose? What about the bird makes it represent you?” Students will be asked to write descriptions of their birds to include feather colors, beak and size characteristics and so on. In concert with this activity students will study their chosen birds within their environments. Students will describe their birds’ various habitats.

Objectives:

1. Each student will utilize art criticism skills to analyze a Baga sculpture.
2. Each student will create a three dimensional work of art, an Anok-type bird sculpture.
3. Each student will apply research on birds, as well as self-reflection, to his/her sculptural design.

Materials:

Cardboard, masking tape, Styrofoam scraps, plastic containers, wire, wire cutters/pliers, brushes, acrylic paint, puffy paints, scissors, plaster gauze, paint markers.

Activity Procedures: Start with class discussions about the Anok sculptures and about Baga culture. Show images of various forms of Anok sculptures and Baga people. Show pictures of the making of a sculpture by a Baga craftsman. Ask students to describe what they see. Have them also describe the elements and/or principles in the Anok sculptures. Tell students they will be creating their own sculptural pieces influenced by Anok concerns and designs. Encourage each student to pick a species of bird and to explain why he/she feels it is a good representation of him/herself. Suggest that students utilize key characteristics of Anok sculptures, for instance, the long beaks. Students will research their chosen birds according to a list of prompts given by the teacher. Students will design and construct their sculptures by combining knowledge of the Anok pieces, within the context of the Anok culture, with their bird research and their self-reflections. Ask students to tell the reasons a long beak symbolizes protection. Ask students to tell situations and events from which people in Tallahassee want protection, as the Baga use these sculptures as a spiritualized defense against various problems and disasters.

Sunshine State Standard: K – 5

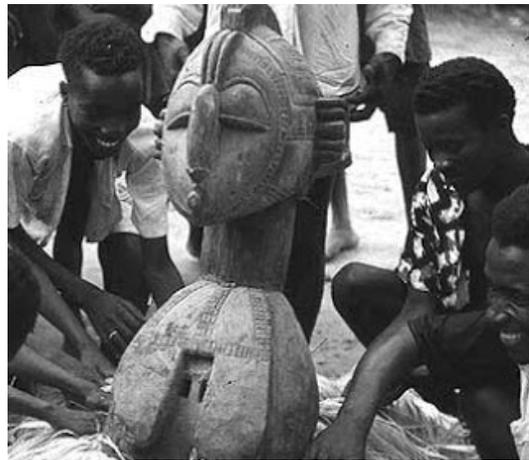
Social Studies: Geography, Places and Religions.

Description: Recognize how people view places differently by asking questions; using graphic organizers; and studying art, poems, legends, or songs about a region or area.

Sunshine State Standard: 6 – 12

Social Studies: Respond critically and aesthetically to various works in the arts.

Standard: Apply various types of critical analysis to works in the arts, including the types and use of symbolism within art forms and their philosophical implications.



Baga people making a sculpture, from Kegel-Konietzko’s years in Africa, http://www.origomundi.com/our_consultant.php

Baga Animal Sculptures, Art History Lesson Plan: 6 – 12

Session Activity: The Baga tribe uses many different animals in their sculpture-making process, all of which have different spiritual meanings to the community. After a general overview of images of the Anok sculptures and culture, have the students research specific pieces. Have each student write a brief description of a specific piece according to the following prompts. After research, have students create PowerPoint presentations so they can share their research with their fellow students.

Prompts:

1. Describe the materials in this piece.
2. What is the dominant element used in this piece? The dominant principle?
3. Name differences between this sculpture and other sculptures of the Baga people. Address them aesthetically, describing differences in the way they look. Address their meanings.
4. What does the animal represent to the Baga culture?
5. Who uses this sculpture? What is its purpose?
6. How long has this sculpture been important in Baga culture?
7. Is this sculpture art?