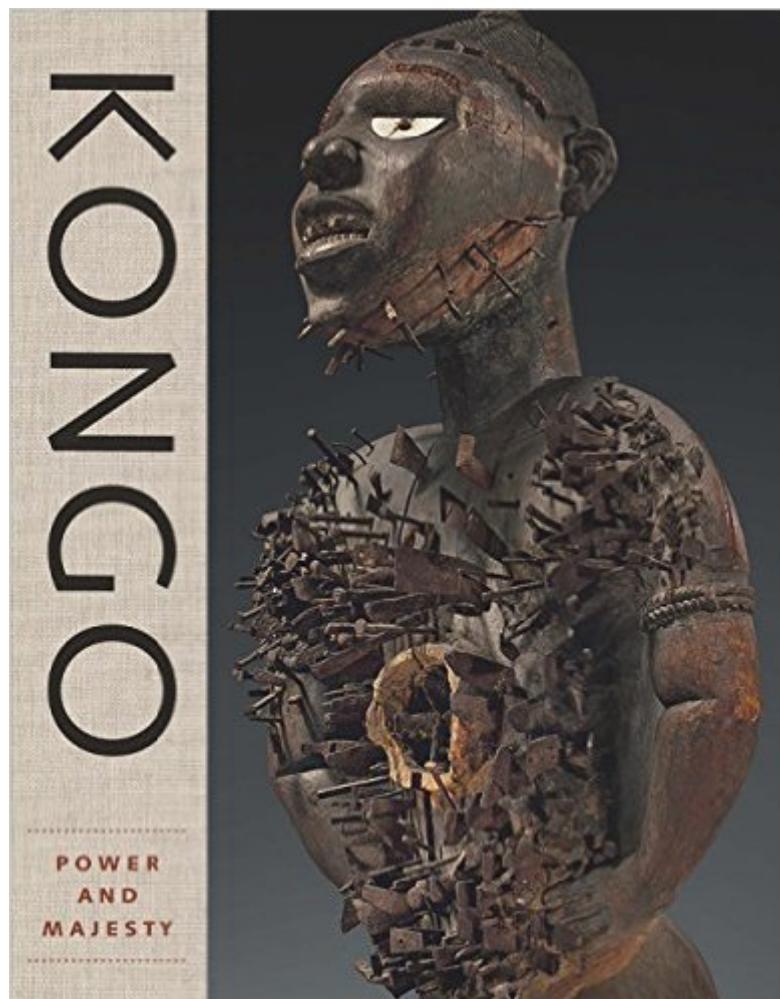


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Kongo: Power And Majesty



Synopsis

A compelling examination of one of the most artistically rich and creative African kingdoms Artists from the kingdom of Kongoâ "a vast swath of Central Africa that today encompasses the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Angolaâ "were responsible for outstanding creative achievements. With the influx of Portuguese, Dutch, and Italian merchants, missionaries, and explorers, Kongo developed a unique artistic tradition that blended European iconography with powerful indigenous art forms. An initially positive engagement with Europe in the 15th century turned turbulent in the wake of later displacement, civil war, and the slave tradeâ "and many of the artworks created in Kongo reflect the changing times. Â This comprehensive study is the first major catalogue to explore Kongoâ ™s history, art forms, and cultural identity before, during, and after contact with Europe. Objects range from 15th-century â œmother-and-childâ • figures, which reflect a time when Europeans and their Christian motifs were viewed favorably, to fearsome mangaaka, power figures that conveyed strength in the midst of the kingdomâ ™s dissolution. Lavishly illustrated with new photography and multiple views of three-dimensional works, this book presents the fascinatingly complex artistic legacy of one of Africaâ ™s most storied kingdoms.Â

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Kongo: Power and Majesty," a beautiful catalogue published to accompany an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, presents artifacts of the former Kingdom of Kongo which stretched over a large chunk of equatorial west Africa. Although the kingdom was not coterminous with the two countries we now call Congo, it did cover much of the territory of the French Congo

(capital: Brazzaville), Belgian Congo (capital: Kinshasa), and Angola. Many collectors and aficionados of African "art"--or more precisely put "artifacts"-- have favorite styles associated with a particular region or ethnic group, and it would be folly to cite one as superior to others. Still, it is safe to say that Kongo art is among the most stunning and distinctive ever created on the continent. The show at the Met includes 134 works, created in wood, ivory, and textiles and drawn from numerous museum collections in both Europe and the United States. Luxury goods, often sent to Europe as gifts or used locally as prestige regalia, are prominent in the show. Also well represented and even more dramatic in size and complexity are wooden carvings that specialists employed to control the spirit world for the benefit of local populations. These artifacts in particular demonstrate how accretions such as iron nails, fabrics, and organic materials empowered such ritual objects, harnessing the energy thought to be ubiquitous in the environment. Given its location on the west coast of Africa and its early and long-term interaction with Europe, the Kingdom of Kongo lost roughly one-third of its population to the slave trade by the mid-19th century. A large percentage of those slaves were settled in the southeast coastal region of this country.

Despite the fact that Alisa LaGamma was born in the DRC (Zaire), and spent her formidable years in various West African countries - not to mention her doctorate research in the DRC - the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition surrounding this publication is grand on "razzle-dazzle lockstep moves" of fascination and alluring intrigue, but comes up short on historical-cultural truths. The guise behind (stolen) minkisi - "Mangaaka" - power figures are merely one example... But greater truth does not meet popular consensus approval, does it? In this case, the greater focus (deflection) is placed on "the Mangaakas" acquired by the Met. The ideology of these statues taken by Europeans during colonial times are spoils of armed conflict, labeled as "war fetishes." And, like many others before her, LaGamma clearly does not allow any lack of consonance to stop her (or the Metropolitan museum's) agenda. Of course, the array of textiles, ivories and other paraphernalia are nice -- as sprinkled in for good measure, but not at all scholarly convincing factors. After-all, the Kongo retains among the best documented accounts of European and African historical relationships, so there is absolutely no excuse anymore!... In 1890, enter a tall, charismatic, "black" American named William Henry Sheppard; the first Westerner to set foot in the Kuba Kingdom, Central Africa. Sheppard is virtually the only witness to the last of the great courts of Central Africa as these existed before the colonial era. (Reference "

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