**TEXTILES**

Some designs being reserved for royalty. In addition, kente cloth is worn of fabric (Figure G). Hand-sew the completed lengths together in order to create a large piece of Ghana, cloth is woven in long, narrow strips by male artists who alternate patterns and designs are often culture-specific, and maintain local significance. For example, the patterns found on the exterior of Mendeke granos pots (Figure H) often mimic the decorative scarification patterns that were formerly applied to women’s bodies. Furthermore, woollen cloths across the continent are used for a variety of functions, including water and grain storage, beer production, and religious practices. Because the porous surface of earthenware pots is efficient in their function, and visually stunning.

**PORRIT**

When surveying the wide variety of arts across the African continent, one may notice some broad conventions regarding gender and art production. Historically, works in wood and metal were often created by male artists, while beaded objects and pottery were typically owned as female arts. One often finds that pot-making techniques vary from region to region, with artists using direct-pull, coiling, and convex mold, and hammer-and-anvil methods. In the same manner, structured patterns and designs are often culture-specific, and maintain local significance.

**CONTEMPORARY ARTS OF AFRICA**

The classical arts of Africa often reflect cultural conventions and traditional styles, the artists who have been making works of art have never existed in a vacuum. Even the earliest examples of artistic production across the continent show evidence of exchange and interaction, often on an international scale. As participants in a global society, artists on the African continent have always engaged with new innovations while producing works that are locally relevant. This notion of continuity and change continues into the present with contemporary arts from the African continent producing avant-garde works for international audiences.

From the synthesised Douglas, contemporary arts movement in Nigeria to creatively unique commercial sign painters, postcolonial artists from Africa continue to be active participants in a global dialogue, and push the bounds of visual expression through artistic innovation, social commentary, and thematic range (Figure G).

**POWER AND STATUS**

With many Mbon-speaking peoples, such as the Ashanti and the Fante, the visual arts are used to express power and status. Such notions are communicated through a wide variety of objects, including stools, staffs, and textiles, as well as precious materials, such as gold. In addition, Akan-speaking artists maintain a masterful use of symbolism, where visual forms often relate to specific accessions, powers, and rituals.

Stocks are among the most important forms of political art, and are used by all elites and public officials as symbols of leadership. Although stocks are also used by non-royal members of society as purely functional objects, their specific shape and design serve as an indicator of an owner’s position and rank. Within this context, one can often identify the status of an individual based on his or her stool, which is reserved only for its owner, and is stored on its side when not in use. In addition to stocks, Akan-speaking cultures maintain a wide array of other royal regalia to communicate status and power, all of which fall under the domain of the State. One such item is the okyeame stool, or linguist’s staff (Figure J), which is held by royal spokesmen who serve as translators, advisors, judges, and ambassadors.

The heads of such staffs are topped with a figural sculpture that elicits one or more proverbs, allowing the okyeame to universally communicate wisdom and act for any given situation.

The finials of such staffs are topped with a figural sculpture that elicits one or more proverbs, allowing the okyeame to universally communicate wisdom and act for any given situation.
ART OF THE LOBI

While many works of art across the African continent reflect culture-based stylistic conventions, sculptures carved by Lobi artists from Burkina Faso are wonderful examples of the creative variety found among individual artists within a single culture or community. Historically, Lobi settlements were organized under the rules and protection of a regional deity, in this, which was associated with the land. Such entities are believed to have the ability to bring prosperity or misfortune, and rely on sculptural forms to engage with the physical realm.

These objects, known as nkisi, serve as intermediaries between the spiritual entity and the community, and are regarded as powerful beings that can bring prosperity or misfortune. For example, Lobi artists carve nkisi to commission and care for a specific nkisi figure, which is believed to have the power to communicate and intervene on behalf of its owner. These figures can be interpreted in a variety of ways based on their visual characteristics.

Many masks across the African continent are used to give physical form to “other-world” spouses, spiritual entities who can bring balance to one’s life. While these figures maintain close relationships with their earthly counterparts, they are often referred to as “other-worldly” beings and are often regarded as the manifestation of a specific entity. The specific function of an nkisi often changes according to its form, as well as the materials used to construct it. In this example, the figure that you see here reflects a variety of unique visual expressions, artists also use form and context to promote the meaning and significance of such objects.

The spectacular masking traditions found across the African continent are a wonderful example of kinetic art. Although one often finds the highly crafted headpieces in museum galleries, such carved and sculpted masks are often part of a performance, which is often accompanied by intricate movements, music, dance, and communal involvement. Many masks across the African continent are used to signify physical form to an otherworldly being, and are often regarded as the manifestation of a spiritual entity. Through the act of giving an image to the unseen, many artists rely on abstract forms to depict an abstract body. Because many masks are often created to make communal associations, they are simultaneously expressions of both earthly and spiritual power, and may be interpreted in a variety of ways based on some aspect of their adornment.

For example, masks used for initiation into the Nkandela association among the Yaka (Figure F) are used to empower and protect adolescent males as they are taught the ideals of adulthood, and often take on the shape of various human and animal forms. In contrast, the Ákporó mask of the Dogon peoples, which appears in funerary contexts, can be interpreted as a lizard, a bird, or even the head of God.

While we often think of the Yaka as a people who were able to communicate and intervene on behalf of its nkisi. As can be seen in these examples, Yaka figures are highly variable in style, as any mask in the community may serve a similar function. While the style of the figure does not impact its effectiveness, the specific features reflect specific powers. For example, large hands are seen as having the ability to fight for the community, while ornate arms symbolize the blessing of fruitful forces. Additionally, two heads (Figure E), such as the example seen below, have the ability to see in multiple directions at once, which makes them both powerful and dangerous.

**FIGURAL SCULPTURE**

Aspects like color and form have a long history of communicating highly specific messages in local contexts, and have been used to convey a wearer’s gender, marital status, affiliation, and social standing. In addition, materials and motifs originating from beyond the African continent have equally impacted the bead arts, bringing new artistic developments through trade and interaction. For example, locally sourced materials, such as shells, beads, bone, wood, and seeds, are often replaced with glass and plastic beads that have become widely available through commercial means (bone, wood, and seeds, are often replaced with glass and plastic beads that have become widely available through commercial means) (Figure A). With these global transformations in mind, one may view the beadwork of Southeast Africa not only as beautiful works of art, but also as pieces that reflect both international and local markers of identity.

**ARTIFICIAL OBJECTS**

Many cultures across the African continent have longstanding traditions of creating everyday objects from a wide variety of materials. In fact, the use of iron technology in West Africa predates that of any other region across the globe.

Whether using wood, fibers, organic materials, or metals, artists continue to create innovative objects that are both functional and aesthetically pleasing. While many of these objects are recognizable to global audiences, their functions are often shaped by local contexts.

For example, the various letters in this display are used to reflect an owner’s status, and to promote the strength and stability of a community. Rather than used in conflict. Such local inventories are equally reflected in the objects themselves, which often combine different materials to create a variety of surface patterns, textures, and forms. While similar objects continue to be locally produced across the continent, many products reflect the influence of global interactions by blending local and foreign materials and motifs.

For example, a Zhou-speaking artist combined the local form of a tobacco pipe with the motif of a European dress shoe, while brass without motifs. This combination of motifs is an example of the creative variety found among individual artists within a single culture or community.