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Mande Worlds and the Upper Niger



4-1. EQUESTRIAN FIGURE, INLAND NIGER DELTA STYLE, ANCIENT MALI, MALI, 13TH-15TH CENTURY (?). TERRACOTTA. 27 1/4" (70.5 CM). NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, D.C. MUSEUM PURCHASE

SWEEPING NORTHWARD AND inland from the eastern hills of Guinea, the Niger River floods the marshy Inland Niger Delta in central Mali before turning to flow southward through Niger. Along this curved stretch of the river, known as the Niger Bend, inhabitants of the savannah encounter peoples of the desert, and traders from the coasts of northern Africa meet merchants from the southern forests.

Urban life developed in the Inland Niger Delta as early as the first century BC, eventually giving rise to the multi-ethnic empires of Wagadu (Ghana), Mali (Manden), Takrur, and Songhai, which flourished variously between the ninth and late sixteenth centuries AD. The peoples who live in this region today stress their historical relationship to these empires. The Soninke often identify with Wagadu groups such as the Malinke ("people of Mali") and the Mandingo or Maninka ("people of Manden") are named for their links to the empire of Mali, as are the closely related Mande languages themselves. Some Mande-speaking groups are identified by their homeland, others by their occupation or their relation to Islam. The farmers of southwestern Mali who long resisted Islam are thus known as "pagans," *bambara*, and call themselves Bamana. The Bamana are famous for their metalwork, their mud-dyed cloth, their masquerades, and their sculpture.

The influence of Mande-speaking cultures has extended far beyond the banks of the Niger. The Julia (Dyula),

traders who speak a Mande language, established mercantile networks that still link the western Sudan to the Atlantic coastline. Over the centuries, the Jula converted to Islam, and some Jula groups formed independent Islamic states in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Jula textiles, manuscripts, and amulets are still traded over vast distances. Peoples speaking Mande-related languages have also spread outward from the upper reaches of the Niger River to settle in Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, and Côte d'Ivoire; their arts are discussed in chapter 6.

In Mande-speaking communities today, leaders take an active role in educating children and guiding youth. Art objects assist elders in their search for esoteric knowledge and encourage both young and old to pursue wisdom and justice, the foundations of the Mande worldview. As in the past, arts viewed as imbued with timeless power coexist with secular arts of entertainment, and artists create new art forms to address a changing society. Yet the diverse arts found along this section of the Niger River still instruct the viewer, imparting moral values and enforcing ethical behavior.

IN THE SPHERE OF ANCIENT EMPIRES

The floodplains of the Niger and Senegal rivers and their tributaries are dotted with raised mounds known as *toge* (sing. *togere*) to the Fulani herdsmen who live among them. Formed over the centuries by layers of sediment, *toge* are the remains of ancient towns. The oldest were occupied over two thousand years ago.

While most have been abandoned over the last five hundred years, some are still inhabited, or are connected with modern communities.

Wagadu

One of the first of these mounds to be excavated by archaeologists was Kumbi Saleh, a large site located just north of the present-day border separating Mali and Mauritania. The site has been identified as Qunbi, the capital of the early state known as Ghana to Arab historians and called Wagadu by the Soninke, the Mande-speaking people who are descended from its inhabitants. Arabic documents chronicle the foundation of Qunbi by a hero who lived many generations before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and suggest that Wagadu flourished from the ninth through the eleventh

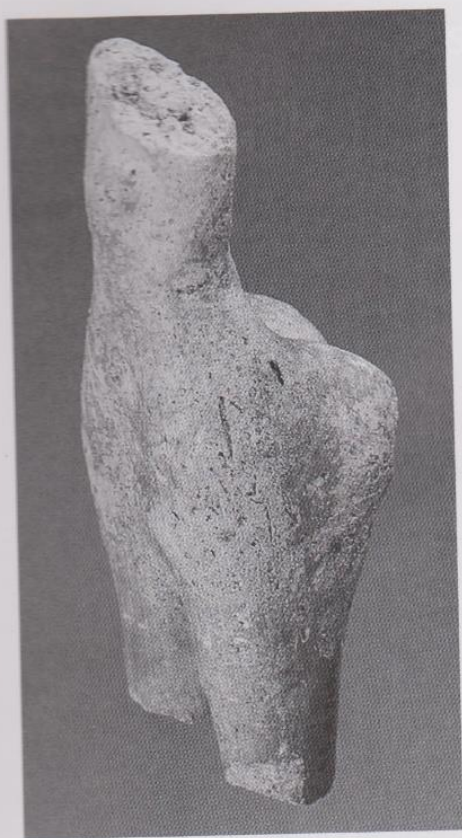
centuries AD. Excavations of Qunbi/Kumbi Saleh support these dates, documenting occupation levels ranging from the sixth through the fifteenth centuries.

According to reports gathered by al Bakri, an eleventh-century Muslim scholar, Qunbi consisted of two towns. One, inhabited by Muslims, sheltered a dozen mosques. The other was the town of the king and his subjects. Surrounding the royal town were priests' dwellings and sacred groves housing prisons, royal graves, and what Muslim visitors described as "idols." The palace has not yet been located, and excavations thus far may have only probed the Islamic portion of the town.

The most important building yet unearthed is a mosque (fig. 4-2). The earliest level of the mosque at Kumbi Saleh dates to the tenth century AD,



4-2. QIBLA OF A MOSQUE, SONINKE BUILDERS, KUMBI SALEH, ANCIENT GHANA/WAGADU, MAURITANIA, 10TH-15TH CENTURY. STONE



4-3. FEMALE FIGURE FROM KUMBI SALEH, MAURITANIA, ANCIENT GHANA/WAGADU, 6TH-10TH CENTURY. TERRACOTTA. HEIGHT 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (10.5 CM). MUSÉE NATIONAL, NOUAKCHOTT

only four centuries after the *hijra* (see p. 29). It was thus one of the earliest mosques constructed south of the Sahara. Later versions of the mosque, constructed prior to the fourteenth century, seem to have been influenced by the Great Mosque at Qairouan in Tunisia (see fig. 1-17), for in the prayerhall were rows of cylindrical columns, and the *qibla* wall was ornamented with painted stone plaques. Yet unlike Qairouan, where Roman and Byzantine ruins supplied builders with monolithic columns and capitals, Kumbi Saleh is located in a region where stone is found only in thin slabs. Builders created columns by stacking stone disks.

A pre- or non-Islamic presence in Kumbi Saleh was revealed by a few ceramic objects found in a layer of refuse beneath the eleventh- and twelfth-century levels of a dwelling. One of these objects, a fragment of a small female figure in terracotta, has a slim torso with a large protruding navel and strikingly pronounced buttocks (fig. 4-3). The excavators believe that it may have been made as early as the sixth or seventh century AD, before the arrival of Islam.

Dwellings of Muslim merchants dating from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries have also been found at Kumbi Saleh. Like the mosque, they were built of layers of flat stone fragments, sometimes ornamented with triangular niches. Their rectangular plans and the techniques used to stack the locally quarried, irregular stones recall the architecture of Saharan cities such as Chinguetti, in Mauritania (see fig. 1-26). The similarities suggest that buildings throughout a vast area of the western Sahel were constructed by Soninke peoples, even when (as is the case with the Soninke-speaking Harratin of Mauritania) they were working for Arabic or Berber patrons.

Many *toge* in the Inland Niger Delta may well have served as burial mounds rather than habitation sites. One such mound near the town of Tondidaru, between the ancient cities of Jenne and Timbuktu, has been excavated and dated to the seventh century AD. Near this site are several clusters of monoliths. During the 1930s the largest cluster was set upright, and several of its stones were shipped to a museum (fig. 4-4). Even though this grouping is now disrupted and incomplete, an undisturbed

group of monoliths has allowed archaeologists to determine that the stones are contemporary with the nearby funerary mounds. The monoliths were thus erected by a people who may have been in contact with Wagadu, which was being established less than two hundred miles to the west.

The monoliths may have served as sanctuaries, stone equivalents of the sacred groves used by many cultures in the region to shelter boys during their initiation into adulthood. This impression is strengthened by some of the linear designs carved into the stones, which make their phallic nature clear. Ranging from 31 to 63 inches (80 to 160 cm) in height, the stones are about as tall as initiation-age boys. One of the stones has a circular boss, possibly representing a navel or face (see fig. 4-4, left).



4-4. DRAWINGS OF TWO MONOLITHS FROM TONDIRARU, MALI, 7TH CENTURY. APPROXIMATELY 5' (150 CM) HIGH

Mali and the Inland Niger Delta

South of Wagadu, in the hills along the Upper Niger, the kingdom of Mali (or Manden) arose during the twelfth century AD. According to the epic songs of Mande bards, Mali was organized as an empire by Sundjata. The son of Sundjata, who succeeded him as king (*mansa*), was a Muslim. During the fourteenth century, a king of Mali named Musa became famous in the Islamic world for the wealth and generosity he displayed during his pilgrimage to Mecca. Musa was instrumental in establishing the cities of Timbuktu, Walata, and Gao as centers of Islamic learning, and he controlled the oases of the Saharan trade routes.

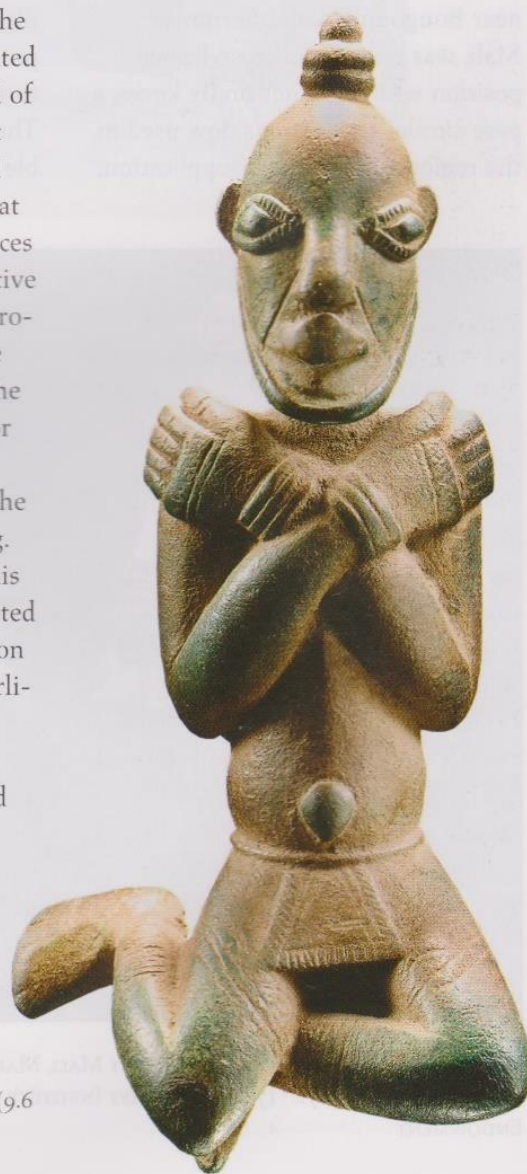
Excavations at Niani, believed to be the ancient capital of Mali, have thus far yielded few objects of any esthetic interest; the most fascinating archaeological finds come from other sites connected to this wealthy kingdom. One of the most important is near the present-day city of Jenne, a site usually referred to as Jenne-Jeno, or Old Jenne. Archaeologists have determined that Jenne-Jeno was inhabited by the beginning of the Christian era. During the height of the Mali empire, its population was apparently related to, though culturally distinct from, the Malinke.

During the excavations at Jenne-Jeno, archaeologists unearthed a terracotta figure placed next to the foundation of a home or shrine. They consulted art historians for suggestions as to how such figures are used today, and how they might have been used in the past. However, the interest which these discussions generated led

to widespread pillaging of ancient sites, and since the 1980s hundreds of terracottas have been illegally unearthed in Mali and sold to foreign art dealers (see *Aspects of African Cultures: The Illicit Trade in Archaeological Artifacts*, p. 78). Although thermoluminescence testing cannot accurately date individual figures without accompanying data from the sites where they were deposited, test results are able to show that the ceramics as a group were probably produced from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries.

The majesty and composure of the terracotta equestrian figure illustrated here amply demonstrate the appeal of the Jenne style (fig. 4-1). The artist has arranged the tubular limbs and torsos of both man and horse so that positive forms outline negative spaces of great formal beauty. The distinctive eyes, ovoid head, and naturalistic proportions are typical of works in the Jenne style. Details, especially on the face, seem to have been scratched or carved into the surface rather than modeled, a technique also used in the much older Nok terracottas (see fig. 3-1). It is interesting to compare this sculpture with the figures of mounted warriors produced in the Bura region of Niger at least three centuries earlier (see fig. 3-5). The Bura figures were found in a funerary context. This figure, however, was excavated illicitly, and thus we cannot know how it was originally used.

Archaeological excavations at Jenne-Jeno have also unearthed gold jewelry. However, the most spectacular metal objects have been pillaged from uncontrolled sites. These include a masterful small figure cast of copper alloy (fig. 4-5). The face of the personage has the clear features and protruding eyes of the Jenne style, and the limbs have the tubular look of the terracotta pieces. The pose of the figure is most intriguing, for a researcher has shown that the arms held across the chest indicate a posi-



4-5. FIGURE IN POSITION OF PRAYER, JENNE STYLE, ANCIENT MALI, 13TH-15TH CENTURY (?). COPPER ALLOY. HEIGHT 3 1/4" (9.6 CM). MUSÉE BARBIER-MUELLER, GENEVA

tion of prayer in modern communities along the Niger River. While religious practices must have changed over the last five or six centuries, we may assume that this figure (and the many ceramic figures that share these gestures) is shown in an attitude of worship.

Terracotta figures in other styles have also been taken from mounds in other areas of the Inland Niger Delta. Apparently they date from approximately the same time period as the Jenne-style works. A figure seized by Malian authorities at a clandestine dig near Bougouni, in southernmost Mali, was seated in a cross-legged position with its hands on its knees, a pose similar to positions now used in the region for prayer or supplication.

Ornaments (or snakes?) were coiled around the neck and arms. The elongation of the arms and torso distinguished it from figures in the Jenne style, as did the softer contours and the spherical (rather than ovoid) shape of the head.

Other ceramic figures dating from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries are said to have been found in or atop memorial mounds at Bankoni, near the Malian capital of Bamako. These stone-covered earthen domes were evidently raised to honor an ancestor or group of ancestors. The five figures illustrated here share the style and possibly the function of documented terracottas from Bankoni (fig. 4-6). The proportions of the figures resemble those of works from the Bougouni

region, but their distinctive heads are more crisply defined. The long noses are unique to the Bankoni style, as is the notched rim encircling each male face.

The Architectural Legacy of Jenne

Terracottas from the Inland Niger Delta were created during particularly turbulent centuries for the Mali empire. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the empire of Songhai arose along the Niger Bend and conquered lands formerly controlled by Mali. During the sixteenth century, Mali's cities on the Niger were raided by soldiers from Morocco.

Stately houses in the Muslim city of Jenne were built during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for community leaders variously descended from Arab scholars, Berber soldiers and their Spanish slaves, Songhai lords, Jula traders, Sorko and Somono fishermen, and local Bamana farmers. Linked to Moroccan models but infused with Mande architectural traditions, these homes were the prototypes for the distinctive and dramatic houses found in Jenne today.

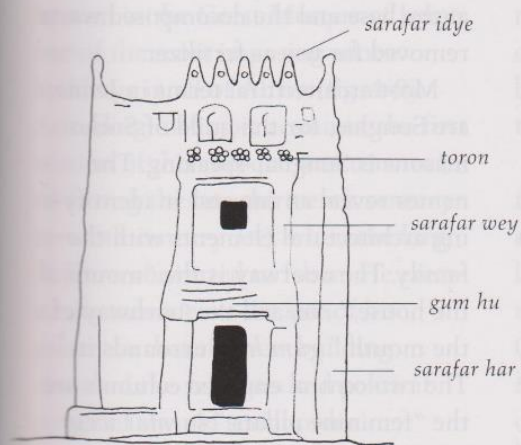
Contemporary Jenne dwellings constructed in this seventeenth-century style are similar in many ways to *tigermatin*, the fortified households of central Morocco (figs. 4-7, 4-8i, 4-8ii; compare fig. 1-22). Both are built of adobe bricks plastered over with a layer of mud, though Moroccan bricks are rectangular while bricks made by Jenne masons are oval, much like the ovoid bricks used by Hausa builders (see figs. 3-26, 3-28). Like *tigermatin*, Jenne houses



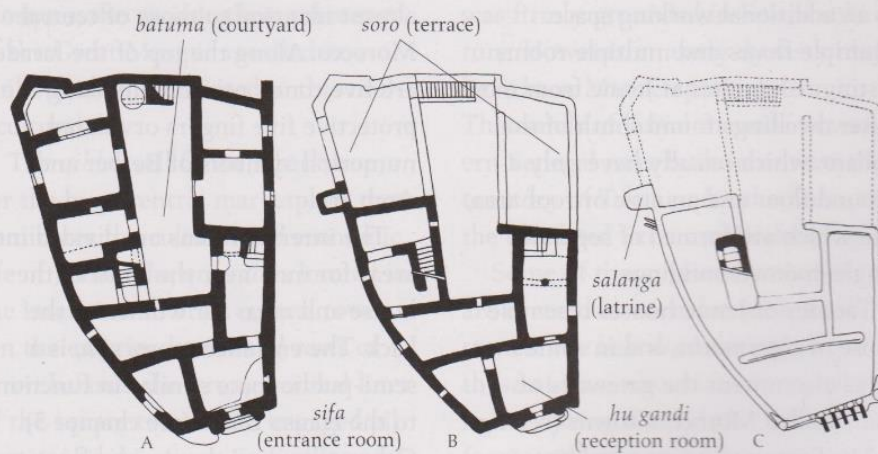
4-6. FIVE FIGURES, BANKONI STYLE, ANCIENT MALI, MALI, 13TH-15TH CENTURY (?). TERRACOTTA. EQUESTRIAN FIGURE 27 1/2" (70 CM). THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, ADA TURNBULL HERTLE ENDOWMENT



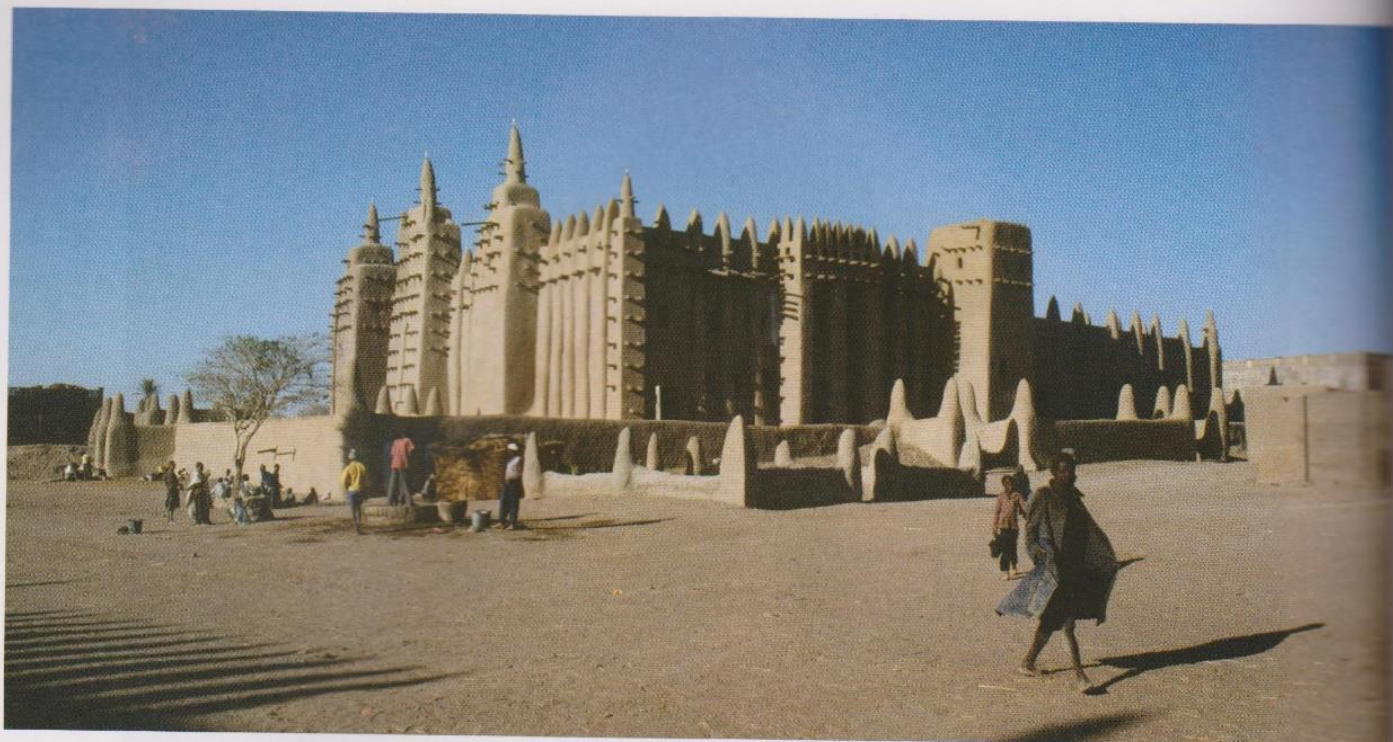
4-7. FACADE OF AN ADOBE HOUSE, JENNE, MALI. SONGHAI BUILDERS FOR MANDE PATRONS. AFTER 16TH CENTURY



4-8I. POTIGE (FACADE) OF AN ADOBE HOUSE IN JENNE. DRAWING AFTER P. MAAS AND G. MOMMERSTEEG



4-8II. PLANS OF THE GROUND FLOOR (A), SECOND FLOOR (B), AND ROOFTOP TERRACE (C) OF AN ADOBE HOUSE IN JENNE. DRAWING AFTER P. MAAS AND G. MOMMERSTEEG



4-9. GREAT MOSQUE, JENNE, MALI, FOUNDED 13TH CENTURY, REBUILT 1907. ADOBE

are multistoried, with an interior courtyard, a formal reception room on an upper story, and a flat roof used as an additional working space. Multiple floors and multiple rooms distinguish homes at Jenne from most other dwellings found south of the Sahara, which usually have only a ground floor and an attic or roof area, and which are formed of separate, single-roomed buildings.

Facades of Jenne houses resemble those of *tigermatin*, and in some ways also mirror the gateways of *ksar*, walled Moroccan towns (see fig. 1-21). Protected by an overhang, doors in Jenne are set into an arch or a rectangular frame. Earthen benches along the base of the wall invite passersby to sit and rest even as they protect the foundation from water damage. A central window covered with an iron or wooden grill marks

the location of the formal reception area, *hu gandi*, on the upper floor. Some older window grills in Jenne are almost identical to those of central Morocco. Along the top of the facade are five cones, possibly invoking the protective five fingers or related numerical symbols of Berber and Arab art.

The interior rooms are divided into areas for men near the front of the house and areas for women at the back. The entrance room, *sifa*, is a semi-public space similar in function to the Hausa *zaure* (see chapter 3). Other rooms on the ground floor are set aside for storerooms and kitchens. The upper-floor reception room, *hu gandi* or *har terey hu*, belongs to the male head of the household and overlooks the street, while private spaces for women overlook the interior courtyard. A screened toilet is located

on the roof, over an earthen shaft that reaches to ground level. The shaft can eventually be broken open at the base and the decomposed waste removed for use as fertilizer.

Most architectural terms in Jenne are Songhai, for the guild of Sorko masons is Songhai-speaking. The names reveal an interest in identifying architectural elements with the family. The doorway is the "mouth of the house," *me*, and the "archway of the mouth," *gum hu*, surrounds it. The two central engaged columns are the "feminine pillars," *sarafar wey*, possibly in opposition to the obviously phallic projections of the framing columns at the corners, *sarafar har*. The five central cones are the "sons of the pillars," *sarafar idye*.

Mande influence is also strong in these Jenne homes, however. The term for the facade itself is *potige*, a

local adaptation of Mande words used in greeting a respected person. The house can thus be seen as a self-presentation by its owner, evoking honor and status. The features of the *potige* seem related to the importance of doorways and facades as the intersection of public and private domains. They also reflect ancient religious practices in Mande-speaking communities, where sacrifices to the ancestors are often poured out on doorways. Projecting from the *potige* are five bundles of wood known as *toron* (sing. *toro*). While their functions may be both aesthetic (an accent repeating the five projections and four recesses above them) and practical (as supports for masons repairing the adobe), the word *toron* connects them to the Mande term for a sacred tree, and they may be conceptually linked to the forked branches placed next to altars by Mande-speaking peoples.

A more dramatic use of *toron* can be seen in the Great Mosque of Jenne, one of the most imposing adobe buildings in all of Africa (fig. 4-9). According to Arabic accounts, the first version of this mosque was constructed during the late thirteenth century (seventh century AH), when the king of Jenne converted to Islam. He erected the mosque on the site of his palace, so that the new building absorbed the religious and political power of the old social order.

Subsequent rebuildings of the mosque reflected the tastes of later Moroccan and Songhai overlords of Jenne. In 1909, French colonial authorities allowed the city, then under Fulani leadership, to reconstruct the mosque under the direction of Ismael Traore, head of the masons'



4-10. INTERIOR OF THE GREAT MOSQUE AT JENNE, 13TH (?), 20TH CENTURY. ADOBE

guild. As was the case with earlier mosques, the varied ethnic patronage of the Great Mosque resulted in a building uniquely suited to this multicultural city.

The *qibla* wall forms a backdrop for the huge central marketplace that dominates the cultural and economic life of Jenne. The *mihrab* is located in the interior wall of its central tower. On the exterior, horizontal rows of *toron* balance the strong vertical lines of the square towers and engaged pillars, grouped in fives. Each pillar projects above the wall in a point, echoing the five "sons of the pillars" in the center of the *potige* of a Jenne house. The pinnacle of each square tower of the *qibla* wall is set with an ostrich egg. Eggs were similarly placed on the minaret of the mosque at Chinguetti

(see fig. 1-26). In Jenne, both Mande and Muslim philosophers see these white, moon-like objects as linked to fertility and the cosmos.

The main entrances and windows to the prayerhall are set into the north wall (in shadow in the photograph here). The slightly lower wall beyond it encloses the open courtyard, a parallelogram whose size and shape mirrors that of the covered hall. Inside the prayerhall, massive square adobe piers are joined by narrow pointed arches (fig. 4-10). Unadorned and unpainted, the interior is cool, dark, and austere.

Takrur and Jolof

In addition to founding Wagadu and Ghana, ancestors of Mande-speaking peoples had influential roles in the rise of other kingdoms and empires in the western Sudan. The Islamic empire of Takrur, Wagadu's western rival along the lower Senegal River, was firmly grounded in Fulani culture. However, an early dynasty may have been Mande-speaking.

Thousands of burial mounds in western Senegal were built in or near the territory of Takrur, now the home of the unrelated Serer and Wolof peoples.

Some of these funerary mounds are covered or encircled with small stones. The best documented are those of Rao, whose cemeteries were in use during the eighth through fourteenth centuries. One contained the remains of a young person wearing 138 gold rings, a silver necklace, and a spectacular chest ornament of gold. The gold pectoral is usually dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century. If this dating is correct, the burial can be associated with the



4-11. CIRCLE OF MONOLITHS, WASSU, GAMBIA, ANCIENT MALI (?), 8TH-15TH CENTURY (?). GRANITE. PHOTOGRAPH 1970S

Monoliths mark or encircle graves in many African cultures. Stone slabs were placed before the tombs of the kings of Kemet before 3000 BC, and stones incised with images of cattle were placed on Nubian graves less than one thousand years later. Prior to the Christian era, monoliths were erected over graves in the Buar region of Central African Republic. Large upright stones marking graves have been documented across central Nigeria, while smaller gravestones are found in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and Guinea.

Wolof state of Jolof, which succeeded the empire of Takrur. The pectoral's finely wrought surface with its hemispherical bosses resembles Wolof gold jewelry made during the last two centuries.

Links between past and present populations are difficult to make in southern Senegal and eastern Gambia, which were once part of the Mali empire. Some 817 tombs have been noted in this region, each encircled by polished volcanic monoliths (fig. 4-11). While most monoliths are in the form of curved cubical or rectangular blocks, as here, some are partially bisected, giving them the appearance of two joined pieces. The grave circles were evidently erected over a very broad period of time from

the beginning of the Christian era to the sixteenth century.

RECENT MANDE ARTS: NYAMAKALAW AND THEIR WORK

The tombs and cities of ancient empires have not yet provided us with documented examples of sculpture in metal or wood, and we have little information on the role of art and artists in past centuries. Today sculpture in iron or wood in Mande-speaking regions is created largely by male blacksmiths, who with female potters form an endogamous group of specialists known as *numuw* (masculine sing. *numu*; feminine sing. *numumuso*). In part because of their

ability to take minerals from the earth and transform them into useful or even dangerous objects, *numuw* are believed to be particularly adept at manipulating a type of esoteric force, a mysterious power known as *nyama*. Along with bards, leatherworkers, and other unusually talented groups of people, sculptors and other blacksmiths are categorized as *nyamakala*, sometimes translated as "handles of *nyama*." *Nyamakala* lineages are found in many Mande-speaking groups, especially the Malinke and Bamana.

As we shall see, blacksmiths make a wide array of sculpture in wood. However, they are particularly proud of the staffs they forge from iron. These slender metal rods, created in secret and shaped with fire, are highly charged with *nyama*. They may serve as the insignia of leaders, or provide a spiritual charge for ancestral altars or graves. Staffs surmounted by figures are also placed near the sanctuaries of Bamana religious associations and are displayed during their initiations and funerals. These *bisa nege* ("rods of iron") or *kala nege* ("staffs of iron") receive libations of beer and other sacrificial drinks, and they warn visitors that potent forces are present.

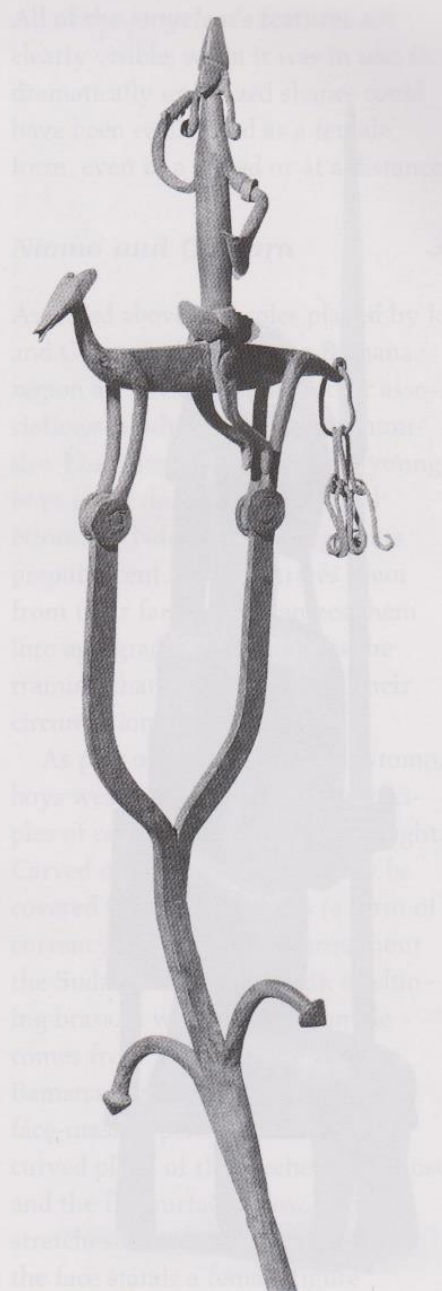
Gwan and Jo

The religious associations that use these iron staffs are generally called *jo* (plural *jow*). While early ethnographies of the Bamana people described these associations as forming a highly organized and coherent social system, recent scholarship suggests that the number of *jow* varies from region to region, as do their names and the responsibilities of their members. For

example, in the south/central Bamana region, the principal *jo* is simply known as *Jo*. Here this single organization, which is dedicated to the harmonious continuity of community life, is charged with many of the roles handled elsewhere by separate associations; the initiation and education of the youth (supervised in other Bamana regions by N'tomo and Ci Wara), the control of spiritual forces for the betterment of the community (often the domain of Kono or Komo), and the nurturing of harmony within the community (sometimes the role of Kore). In this region another association, *Gwan*, addresses the creative forces responsible for human fertility. Its ceremonies, and its art forms, may sometimes be incorporated into *Jo*.

The *bisa nege* or *kala nege* of fig. 4-12, topped by an obviously male equestrian figure, would have been a particularly appropriate image for *Jo*. The rider's erect pose and aggressive gestures allude to the heroism, occult power, and accomplishment of a leader of the *Jo* or *Gwan* association. His broad hands have been compared to the feet of a crocodile, a dangerous animal whose body parts are used by sorcerers as well as by members of benevolent associations. Other staffs used by *Jo* or *Gwan* are topped by female equestrians, or by female figures in similarly assertive positions.

Blacksmiths also carve wooden statuary for *Gwan*. An imposing seated figure of a mother holding a child (fig. 4-13), known generically as *gwandusu*, would have a personal name as well. Through verbal association, the compound term *gwandusu* links nouns such as soul, heart, character, passion, fire, courage (*dusu*) with adjectives such as hot, hard, and



4-12. STAFF WITH EQUESTRIAN FIGURE, BAMANA, MALI, 19TH–20TH CENTURY. IRON. HEIGHT 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (61.2 CM). THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK. MICHAEL C. ROCKEFELLER MEMORIAL COLLECTION. BEQUEST OF NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER, 1979

difficult (*gwan*). The *gwandusu* here wears an amulet-laden hunter's or sorcerer's cap, an item of clothing usually owned by powerful men. She is exceptionally strong, a heroine and champion. Yet she also shelters a tiny baby, the deeply desired result of the successful pregnancy that the association works to obtain for its members. The child is so completely attached to her full abdomen that it merges into its mother, and her heavy breasts appear to be full of sustaining milk.

The *gwandusu* was probably the central image in a group of three or more statues once displayed during annual festivals. It was accompanied by other figures displaying extraordinary powers, such as horsemen. Figure 4-13 includes one of these attendants, a seated male leader, or *gwantigi*, who also wears a distinctive hat, carries a spear, displays a dagger, and is presented as a warrior. Other male and female figures in attendance performed the activities necessary for civilized life, such as carrying water pots or playing musical instruments. As a group, the displayed figures embodied the association's goals, which encourage both personal ambition and service to others, both "paternal" strength and passion and "maternal" responsiveness to family needs. They thus reinforce the duality seen in the *gwandusu* herself.

Jo organizes all of the young men of the community into age-grades, usually about every seven years; in some areas, *numuw* youths form a separate group, but often they are welcome to join all other youths. The new age-grade is assembled and taken to a sacred grove of trees, where the young men set up an initiation camp. There the leaders of *Jo* show them a



4-13. GWANDUSU AND GWANTIGI (PAIR OF DISPLAY FIGURES), BAMANA, MALI, 15TH–20TH CENTURY. WOOD. MOTHER 48 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (123.5 CM). MALE 35 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (89.9 CM). THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK. THE MICHAEL C. ROCKEFELLER MEMORIAL COLLECTION, BEQUEST OF NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER, 1979 AND GIFT OF THE KRONOS COLLECTIONS IN HONOR OF MARTIN LERNER, 1983

The gwandusu (mother-and-child figure) of this pair probably came from the region where the Bougouni and Bankoni terracottas (see fig. 4-6) have been unearthed, and it shares some of the stylistic qualities of the terracottas of ancient Mali. In fact, analysis has revealed that the wood from which it was carved is five or six centuries old. Since trees may have been standing for a hundred years or more before being used by carvers, the statue might date from the seventeenth or eighteenth century AD. It would thus bridge the time between the terracotta figures of the distant past and the wooden figures still being carved today.



4-14. FIGURE, PERHAPS A JONYELENI ("PRETTY LITTLE ONE OF JO"), BAMANA. WOOD. HEIGHT 24" (61 CM). THE NEW ORLEANS MUSEUM OF ART, BEQUEST OF VICTOR K. KIAM

Although the crested head of this female figure may refer to the rainbow-like arches of wood or fiber worn by new Jo initiates, we cannot be completely sure that it is a jonyele. It may instead be an image of a twin, a flanitokele. The Bamana consider twins to be living replicas of the first two human beings created, and a source of great blessing. When a twin dies in infancy, a wooden statue may be carved to represent the deceased child, and figures for deceased female twins are given the attributes of sexually mature young women. A female flanitokele is thus indistinguishable from a jonyele.

variety of objects, perhaps including sculptural groups and iron staffs, which are symbols of important principles and sources of Jo's sacred authority. At the end of their initiation, young men celebrate their new maturity and knowledge by dancing for their community. They then leave their hometown to visit neighboring and allied towns, where they meet future friends and potential wives. Each of these traveling groups of Jo initiates performs using costumes, musical instruments, and theatrical skits to entertain their hosts. Young blacksmiths may also carry small wooden figures dressed in fine clothing and jewelry (fig. 4-14). Called "pretty little one of Jo," *jonyeleni* (pl. *jonyeleniw*), these small statues remind both elders and eligible girls that the young men are seeking brides.

The polished and decorated surfaces of a *jonyeleni* do not detract from their strong, almost stark translation of the human form into geometric shapes and abruptly intersecting planes. This style contrasts remarkably with the style of the Bamana *gwandusu* and *gwantigi* figures discussed above. The *jonyeleni*'s circular hips, narrow cylindrical torso, and conical breasts echo the praises of an epic sung by renowned Malinke bard Seydou Camara:

A well-formed girl is never
disdained,
Namu ...
Her breasts completely fill her
chest,
Namu ...
Her buttocks stood out firmly
behind her ...
Look at her slender, young
bamboo-like waist ...

All of the *jonyeleni*'s features are clearly visible; when it was in use, the dramatically organized shapes could have been easily read as a female form, even in a crowd or at a distance.

Ntomo and Ci Wara

As noted above, the roles played by Jo and Gwan in the southern Bamana region are divided among other associations in other Bamana communities. Elsewhere, the training of young boys is the domain of a *jo* called Ntomo or Ndomo. Ntomo gathers prepubescent boys, separates them from their families, organizes them into age-grades, and conducts the training that culminates with their circumcision.

As part of their training in Ntomo, boys wear masks alluding to principles of conduct they are being taught. Carved of wood, the masks may be covered with cowrie shells (a form of currency formerly used throughout the Sudan), blood-red seeds, or shining brass. A well-known example comes from Segou, in the eastern Bamana region (fig. 4-15). The oval face-mask is partitioned into the curved plane of the forehead and nose and the flat surface below, which stretches from brow to chin. Above the face stands a female figure flanked by four vertical horns.

French researchers who studied Bamana religion during the middle of the twentieth century were fascinated by the complexity of the themes raised during Ntomo initiation. According to their reports, which may have been somewhat enhanced by the philosophical orientation of the researchers, boys in training re-enacted the creation of the world. The fig-



4-15. NTOMO MASK, BAMANA, MALI.
WOOD. HEIGHT 25 1/2" (64.3 CM). MUSÉE DU
QUAI BRANLY, PARIS

4-16. AGE-GRADE MASQUERADE, MALINKE (?), GUINEA. PHOTOGRAPH 1970S



4-17. SAHO (YOUNG MEN'S HOUSE), SOMONO, MALI



ures and the number of horns at the top of a Ntomo mask symbolized important principles; the four prongs shown here referred to femininity, while three was a male number, and seven the number for the couple. The female figure was also described as a reference to sacred history, when the human race was separated into male and female beings, and a reminder to the boys of the training they had received concerning the opposite sex.

Although Ntomo is by no means universal, even in Bamana lands, virtually all Mande-speaking communities have associations that group young boys into age grades and prepare them for circumcision. Muslim families may link the circumcision of their sons to instruction in a mosque, and both Muslim and non-Muslim age-grades may perform for their communities wearing special costumes and masks (fig. 4-16). When boys are undergoing Ntomo or similar training, they leave their families and may live in temporary shelters. Along the Niger Bend, however, a newly formed boys' age-grade or youth association is housed in a more durable adobe dwelling known as a *saho*, built especially for them. The recessed geometric patterns of one such dormitory, evidently built for initiates of a Mande-speaking group called the Somono, may have been chosen for symbolic as well as aesthetic reasons (fig. 4-17). The members of the age-grade eventually marry and move to their own homes, and the *saho* is left to decay.

In some Bamana areas, the training conducted by Ntomo is completed when the age-grade enters Ci Wara, or Tyi Wara (both ways of writing the term are pronounced *chi wara*). Ci

1058. Afrique Occidentale - SOUDAN - Danseurs "Miniankas"
Fétiches des Cultures



4-18. CI WARA
MASQUERADERS,
BAMANA, MALI.
PHOTOGRAPH
1905-6

4-19.
HORIZONTAL-
STYLE CI WARA
DANCE CREST,
BAMANA, BAMAKO
OR BELEDUGU
REGION, MALI.
WOOD, IRON,
BASKETRY. HEIGHT
41" (24 CM).
MUSEUM
RIETBERG, ZURICH



Wara prepares them for their future
roles as husbands and fathers by pair-
ing them with younger girls who
become their partners. It also focuses
upon the agricultural skills they need
to become successful farmers who can
provide for their families and con-
tribute to the community.

In Bamana belief, the primordial
being Ci Wara is a creature of the
wild who taught mankind how to cul-

tivate the fields. *Ci* is a term referring
to farming, while *Wara* is a generic
term for wild beast. This supernatural
creature has given his name to both
the *jo* and to its masquerade. During
annual ceremonies, two members of
the age-grade are chosen to dance as
Ci Wara and his female consort. A
photograph from the early twentieth
century shows a Ci Wara masquerade
in the fields (fig. 4-18). Both mas-

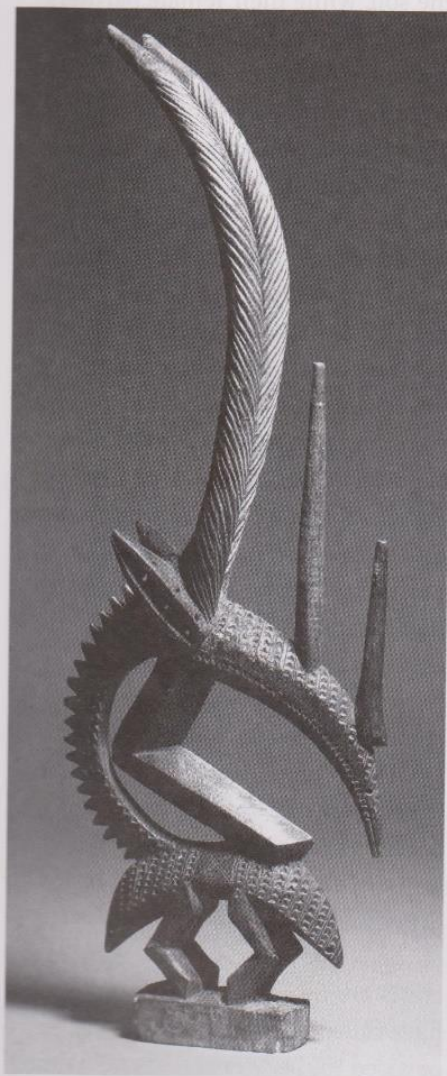
queraders are bent over, for an excel-
lent farmer hoes the ground continu-
ally, without straightening to take a
rest, and staffs transform the two-
legged dancers into four-legged ani-
mals. The costumes of darkened fiber,
the cloth band tying the basketry caps
to their heads, and the tall wooden
headdresses attached to the caps are
all clearly visible. Drummers provide
the beat for the dance and for the
youths of the age-grade as they till
the soil, while their female partners
exhort them to greater efforts and
praise Ci Wara.

Although the label of this old
photograph claims that the dancers
are "Minianka," the masqueraders
shown here were probably from the
eastern Bamana lands, where the
Ci Wara headdress resembles
the profile of a roan antelope. The
antelope is an appropriate manifesta-
tion of this farming wild beast, for it
arches its neck just as the cultivators
bend their backs, and its long horns
are as straight and slender as growing
millet stalks. The headdress of Ci
Wara's consort here depicts an ante-
lope carrying a baby on its back, just
as human mothers do. In other
regions the two performers wear
identical masks.

Ci Wara masks are crest masks or
dance crests, for they sit on top of the
dancer's head. Both the head and
much of the body of the dancer are
usually hidden by a costume. North
of the Niger River, Ci Wara dance
crests are carved in what observers
have called the "horizontal style," as
opposed to the "vertical style" of the
eastern Bamana. As can be seen in fig.
4-19, their horns sweep backward
rather than upward, and the snake-
like horns may allude to some of the

stories told about Ci Wara. The body and head are almost canine. Beads, leather, and metal attachments may be added to embellish the masquerade; Bamana say that such ornamentation gives the dance crest *di*, "sweetness" or "tastiness."

Finally, an "abstract style" is used in the Bougouni region where the southwestern Bamana live (fig. 4-20). It combines curved antelope horns,



4-20. CI WARA DANCE CREST, BAMANA. SIKASSO REGION. WOOD. HEIGHT 20" (51 CM). STAATLICHES MUSEUM FÜR VOLKERKUNDE, MUNICH

fragments of horns, anteater snouts (for rooting into the earth), and the canine animal of the "horizontal style," to create a multiple image. As in all Ci Wara dance crests, a variety of textures marks each section of the sculpture, softening the austerity of the overall form. This style is closest in form to the headdresses of community age-grades of Bamana (and non-Bamana) groups whose functions and purposes may be quite similar to those of Ci Wara. Simply called "little antelope heads," *soguni kun*, such headdresses are performed both by age-grades and by the professional dance troupes that draw from them.

There are large numbers of Ci Wara dance crests in museums, and the "vertical style" of the eastern Bamana region has become one of the most recognizable and most reproduced of all African art forms. It appears in corporate logos in West Africa, on public buildings in Mali, and in hundreds of markets where objects are sold to tourists (see *Aspects of African Cultures: Export Arts*, p. 152). In recent years, American artist Willie Cole has constructed playful and enormously appealing vertical Ci Wara headdresses out of discarded bicycle parts; one is titled "Schwinn Chi Wara."

Bogolanfini

Male circumcision, the surgical removal of the foreskin, corresponds in Mande thought to female excision, the surgical removal of the clitoris. Just as all boys who wish to become adult men must be willing to undergo seclusion, training, and circumcision, girls who wish to become adult women

must undergo equivalent procedures conducted by a *numumusuw* surgeon, usually a potter. Mande speaking communities realize that both procedures are dangerous, and possibly fatal, but foreign critics have thus far only voiced their opposition to excision (or clitoridectomy). In order to protect the girls from the dangerous levels of *nyama* released during excision, Bamana *numususuw* employ a variety of means. For example, they wrap the girls in mud-dyed cloths called *bogolanfini* or simply *bogolan*. *Bogolan* are created by women, who paint mixtures of iron-rich mud materials onto locally woven cotton cloth dyed in a vegetable concoction in several different stages. The chemical reaction taking place between the iron in the mud and the vegetable dyes in the presence of sunlight creates the rich, dark colors. The very complexity of the staining and washing processes may produce an object with the supernatural strength needed to guard the girls, just as the process of forging iron increases the *nyama* of a metal staff.

The geometric symbols that decorate the cloth illustrated here suggest that it is a *basiaie*, one of the *bogolan* cloths used in Bamana excision (fig. 4-21). After a girl has worn a *basiaie* during the ceremonies, she gives it to her sponsor, a female elder who is past menopause. When this old woman dies, she may be buried in the cloth in order to protect the mourners from the extraordinary amounts of *nyama* released at her death. These textiles therefore allow a community to acknowledge the power of women while deflecting its energy.

While hunters wear protective tunics of *bogolan* while facing the dangers of the wilds, mud-dyed cloth



4-21. BOGOLAN. BAMANA, MALI, 20TH CENTURY. COTTON FABRIC. 53½ x 32½" (136 x 83 cm). THE BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON

While this bogolan was probably used during a girl's initiation, other types of mud-dyed cloth are sewn into shirts for hunters, who need to be shielded from the *nyama* lurking in the wilderness and flowing from the blood of the animals they kill. The women who paint these geometric shapes on bogolan often give them individual names and meanings. Some signs may refer to the great Mande epics, to ideal behavior, or to the problems encountered by women.

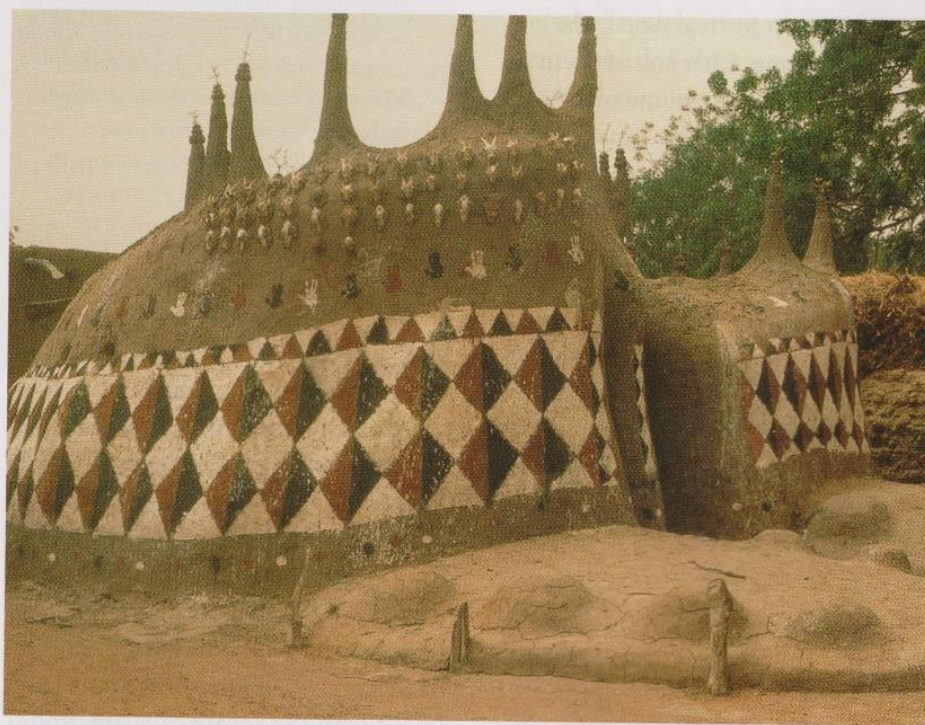
has always been an item of beauty as well as power; girls, female elders, and hunters appreciate the visual appeal of the art they wear as protection. Malian designers began to sew *bogolan* into fashionable clothing and accessories as early as the 1970s, and mud-dyed cloth can now be purchased in Europe and America as well as Africa.

Komo and Kono

The manipulation of *nyama* is even more central to the *jow* that have been characterized as "closed associations," "power associations," or even "secret societies." Each has a distinctive community shrine (fig. 4-22) housing the sacred belongings of the group. These might include iron staffs, masks, and masquerade costumes, but

the most powerful item possessed by a *jo* is an altar, or *boli* (pl. *boliw*). The *boli* illustrated here (fig. 4-23) is an amorphous three-dimensional object formed of dark layers of mysterious materials, all of them secret and all of them laden with *nyama*. The size of a small child, its ambiguous form seems to evoke an animal. A hollow channel running from "mouth" to "anus" may have allowed libations to be poured through it. The *boli* was activated, spiritually charged, when it received the libations, the blood sacrifices, and sometimes the spittle of the assembled members of the association. It was thus a reservoir of their *nyama*. This sacred object seems to have been confiscated by colonial authorities from a shrine used by the men's association known as Kono.

Kono was once an important *jo* among the Bamana, though it is now in decline. Evidently the leaders of



4-22. KONO SOCIETY SHRINE, BAMANA, GOMAKORO, MALI. PHOTOGRAPH 1985



4-23. *BOLI* (ALTAR), BAMANA, MALI, BEFORE 1931. WOOD ENCRUSTED WITH SPIRITUALLY CHARGED MATERIALS. LENGTH 23 1/2" (60 CM). MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY, PARIS

Kono were bards, the *nyamakalaw* who have served noble families as praise singers and leatherworkers, and who are noted musicians. The origin for Kono may extend back over seven hundred years. According to the writings of a fourteenth-century visitor to the Mali court,

When it is a festival day ... the poets ... come. Each one of them has got inside a costume made of feathers to look like a thrush with a wooden head for it and a red beak as if it were the head of a bird. They stand before the sultan ... and recite their poetry ... I was informed this practice is old amongst them ...

During the twentieth century, masqueraders for both Kono and a powerful *jo* known as Komo have worn feathered costumes, and the projecting jaws on their headdresses might be interpreted as a bird's beak. However, twentieth-century examples were not red.

Great amounts of *nyama* are wielded by the blacksmiths who direct

Aspects of African Cultures

Shrines and Altars

Shrines and altars are specially constructed sites of ritual objects and activity. They promote communication between humans and their gods, radiating spiritual energy from the earthly realm to worlds beyond. A charm worn on the body, for example, is a small altar whose single message, usually about personal welfare, beams constantly outward. Figural sculptures are often altars, as are power images such as those of the Fon and Bamana of West Africa and the Kongo of Congo, which assemble diverse materials. All shrines and altars are instrumental; they exist to accomplish something, to offer a charged site from which petitions and sacrifices are channeled to ancestors, spirits, and deities on behalf of people needing help.

Altars and shrines range from small portable objects to entire buildings full of sacred materials. Small altars such as figural sculptures among the Igbo and Baule may be invoked for personal or family benefit. Many shrines maintained by lineages focus on ancestors, both those who have actually lived and died, and founding ancestors whose historical existence may or may not be factual, but whose moral force is unquestioned. Ancestral shrines contain symbols—stones, ceramic vessels, trees, figures, or accumulations—which focus ritual and often involve sacrifice. Larger, composite shrines serve entire communities and incorporate specific and general

powers. The gods in such shrines are often called tutelary, meaning protective. They are often associated with various aspects of the natural world (local rivers or forests, the earth, the sky, thunder, iron, or other phenomena) and watch over human and agricultural productivity and the people's health and welfare.

Consecration rituals bring community shrines into worshipers' "lives," and rituals again activate their powers when worshipers need them. These rituals are generally overseen by a permanent priest or priestess, who is believed to have close ties with the god and has been trained in its needs and actions. Such rituals normally involve sacrifice, from an offering of coins or a splash of wine, to blood from a ritually killed animal. Sacrificial blood is seen as food for the god. The rest of the animal is suitable only for mere mortals, and is later divided ceremoniously and shared out among worshipers to be eaten.

A self-conscious, artistic arrangement of furnishings is common, although many shrines have what appear to outsiders to be disorderly arrangements. Large accumulations of offerings such as clay, shells, broken pottery, or metal blades are common. Blood and chicken feathers are the most usual sacrificial residue, proof that the gods have been well fed. Today, some shrine sculptures have been removed, often sold. Yet shrines remain active, proof that most cultures understand such images to be symbolic, and not deities in themselves. HMC

the social, political, religious, and judicial association known as Komo. Various accounts of its origin claim that Komo was spread through the Mali empire by a blacksmith who served Sundjata, or that a *mansa*, a king, purchased Komo during his stay in Mecca. Despite these attempts to link it with the spread of Islam, Komo has often been persecuted by Islamic

leaders. Its political roles brought it into conflict with colonial authorities as well. Yet in some areas this association has survived as a potent guarantee of public security, as a defense against witchcraft and anti-social behavior, and as an educational institution for men who seek to understand the secrets of the world around them.



4-24 KOMO KUN ("HEAD OF KOMO"), BAMANA, MALI. WOOD, RESIN, FEATHERS, QUILLS, FIBERS, ANIMAL HAIR. LENGTH 27" (68.6 CM). INDIANA UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM, BLOOMINGTON

Few photographs of Komo masquerades exist, for women and non-members are usually barred from Komo ceremonies. The dancers' costumes evidently consist of a series of rings into which feathers and other materials are set. The entire body is hidden. Upon the dancer's head is a headdress known as "head of Komo," *komo kun* (fig. 4-24). Sedu Traore, a Bamana *numu*, has said, "The *komo kun* is made to look like an animal. But it is not an animal; it is a secret." Indeed, although the domed central hemisphere, projecting jaws, and backswept horns of a Komo head-dress, or a Kono headdress, recall the horizontal backswept horns of Ci Wara crests, the *komo kun* is startlingly different from Bamana art works described as having *di* (sweetness). It is caked with a grayish dark substance, once wet and glistening, now dry and flaking. Horns of slain

antelopes are lashed to the wooden substructure. Bundles of grasses and leaves, skulls, bones, and parts of animals may also be embedded in the thick surface.

Komo masters, *komotigiw*, cover a *komo kun* with mysterious materials to intimidate their audience and to refer to their secret knowledge of powerful substances. They further believe that the impression the head-dress makes on the senses is but the outward manifestation of the *nyama* contained within it. By unleashing a properly prepared *komo kun*, a masquerader is empowered to perceive and destroy evil. In fact, a *komo kun* can be described as a mobile *boli*.

Kore, Secular Masquerades, and Puppetry

Another particularly powerful *jo* is called Kore. Seemingly less wide-

spread and influential than in the past, Kore once sponsored a vibrant form of theater, challenging immoral authority and hypocritical morality through the sexually explicit gestures and buffoonery of its masquerades. Dancers promoted common decency by mocking irresponsible and outrageous behavior. Kore performances seem to have featured both puppets and masqueraders, the latter wearing wooden face masks in the shape of the lazy or wily animals they portrayed.

A rare photograph of a Kore horse, *kore duga*, shows the dancer wearing a heavy wooden mask with long mule-like ears, a domed forehead, pierced eyes, and a square muzzle (fig. 4-25). In one hand he carries a long wooden imitation of a sword, and in the other he manipulates his beribboned penis-like "mount." The long slit in the oval object against one shoulder is a clear reference to female genitals. The rest of the net costume holds discarded objects and refuse. The *kore duga* is clearly the antithesis of a polite Bamana person.

Kore's role in exposing human frailties, and in reinforcing the common values of society, is partially filled today in Mande-speaking regions by community age-grades. These associations, usually called *Kamelon Ton*, organize young men and women into groups by age and act as self-help organizations. In order to raise funds and provide entertainment for a community, members of a *Kamelon Ton* (particularly those of the Somono, the Bozo, and the Bamana peoples) put on elaborate performances that can last several days. Today competitions between groups are sponsored by cultural



4-25. KORE DUGA ("KORE HORSE") MASQUERADER, BAMANA, MALI. PHOTOGRAPH 1931

Researchers in the middle of the twentieth century wrote that a man would need to join five major Bamana associations (Ntomo, Tyi Wara, Komo, Kono, and Nama) before being initiated into Kore. They believed that Kore masquerades such as this represented the culmination of a man's education, and served as the foundation for a just society. Although this research cannot be verified today, it does indicate that Kore masqueraders once played an important role in Bamana culture.

4-26. PERFORMANCE OF KAMELON TON, BAMANA, NIENOU VILLAGE, SEGOU, MALI. PHOTOGRAPH 1989

associations, but rivalries between groups have always animated the performances.

In addition to music and masquerades, a *Kamelon Ton* production features huge zoomorphic forms, which are constructed of brightly woven and appliquéd cloth and plant fiber on a wooden frame, and are fitted with carved, moveable heads (fig. 4-26). The heads are often adorned with multiple horns, and may be embedded with mirrors or covered with scintillating patterns in bright color. Hidden performers supporting the body of the beast allow it to dance to the accompanying music. As an added bonus, these huge mobile creatures bristle with rod puppets, consisting of wooden sculptures of heads, or partial figures on sticks. The brightly painted and clothed puppets are also manipu-



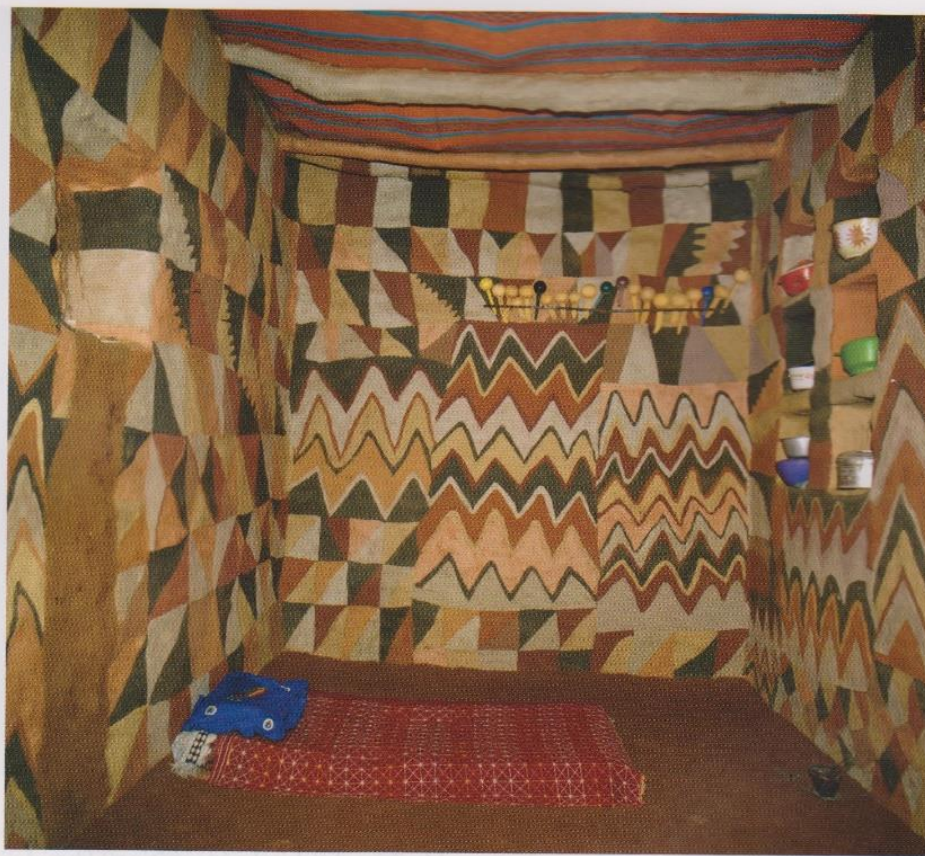
lined by the performers. These puppet characters are often generic (a typical "beautiful woman" may be seen on the beast at the left of fig. 4-26), but they act out various plots and subplots whose specific political and social references are couched within more generalized messages about leadership, heroism, and community relationships.

Age-grades and other theatrical groups among some Mande-speaking peoples may present only the animated stage-animal itself, without puppets. This is especially the case in southern Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, where the animal's head is the visual focus of the performance. In some southern Mande-speaking areas, these huge animal masquerades are considered secret, and may not be viewed by women. Usually, however, female singers in the audience provide important verbal, visual, and musical accompaniment.

Boundaries between secular and sacred performances in Mande-speaking communities are not always as clear as this discussion might suggest. The gaily colored animal who dips and swings and raises its head is able to do so in part because of the *nyama* of the dancers. A Komo masquerader who emits strange noises, breathes fire, and rises high into the air can entertain as well as inspire his audience. In both private religious ceremonies and public spectacles, displays of art lead communities to reflect upon their values and their history.

ARTS OF THE HOME

The puppetry, masquerades, and statuary described above are displayed at festivals and ceremonies, and then



4-27. PAINTED INTERIOR BY HABOU CAMARA, SONINKE, OULOUMBINI, MAURITANIA. PIGMENT ON ADOBE

returned to storage. While these dramatic art forms impress locals and outsiders alike, well-made items used in everyday life are often overlooked by visitors. These household arts include the large ovoid water storage pots and other impressive ceramic vessels made by Mande-speaking *numumus* and by other female potters in neighboring groups. In some Mande-speaking regions, domestic art forms made by women also include the painted and sculpted ornamentation of houses and compounds.

Soninke women who live along the Senegal River in southern Mauritania and eastern Senegal paint the interiors and exteriors of their homes. The bedroom of Mme. Habou Camara is

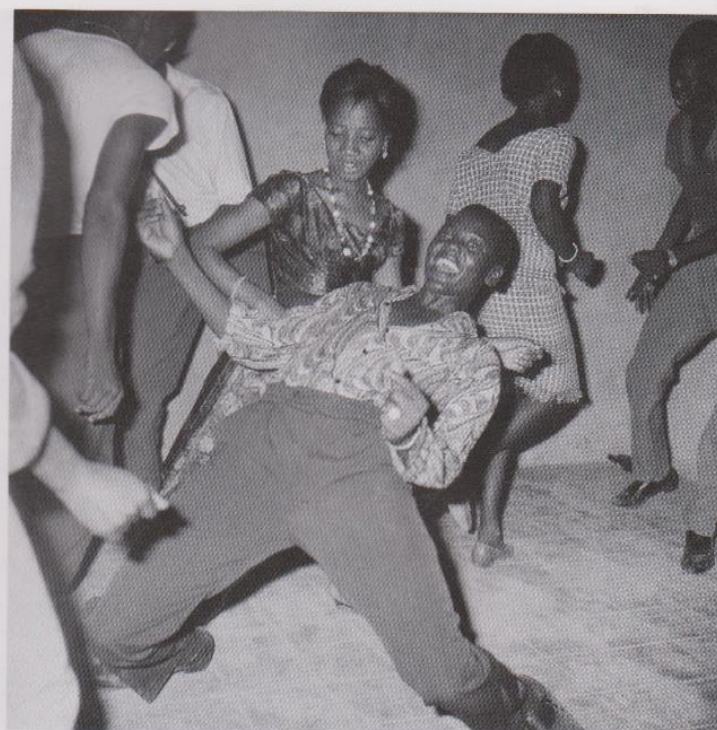
an excellent example of this vibrant art (fig. 4-27). Unlike the more tightly organized shapes of Bamana women's *bogolanfini*, which are monochromatic, this mural uses a range of yellows and reds. Other Soninke women also use bright blues and greens in their energetic designs. Their murals may offer protection and blessing as well as beauty, just as the wall paintings created by Soninke-speaking Harratin women for patrons in the oasis city of Walata, Mauritania, relate to ideas of prestige, fertility, increase, and community (see fig. 1-27).

Men and women throughout Africa hang photographs on their walls both to embellish their homes



4-28. *UNTITLED*, SEYDOU KEITA, MALI, 1958.
BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH.
CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART COLLECTION—
THE PIGOZZI COLLECTION, GENEVA

and to honor family members. In this region the practice began during the early twentieth century, when wealthy Africans in the cities of Dakar, St. Louis, and Bamako began to commission portraits from local photographers. One of the most talented photographers working in Bamako during the mid-twentieth century was Seydou Keita (1923–2004), who produced thousands of portraits between 1949 and his retirement in 1977. A photograph from 1958 demonstrates his meticulous craft (fig. 4-28). Keita has posed his pensive subject with a flower, created an interesting range of textures and patterns with his cloth backdrop, and selected an exposure that enhances



4-29. *UNTITLED*,
MALICK SIDIBE,
BAMAKO, MALI,
1962. GELATIN
SILVER PRINT,
23 7/8 X 19 1/2"
(60 X 50 CM).
CONTEMPORARY
AFRICAN ART
COLLECTION—
THE PIGOZZI
COLLECTION,
GENEVA

the range of light and dark in this black-and-white composition. The subject chose her own hat and her dress, which reflect both contemporary French fashion and Malinke preferences for elaborate headdresses and bright cloth.

Originally Keita produced fairly small prints for clients, and they were displayed in discreet glass frames in private homes. After Seydou's negatives were purchased by (or lent to) foreign entrepreneurs, professional photographers in Europe and the United States printed the images on an enormous scale on expensive paper, yielding deep, rich contrasts. Some of these splendid photographic prints are over six feet tall, and fill the walls of the galleries where they have been displayed. The photograph reproduced here was printed in Europe, and is at least four to five times larger than the photograph

originally printed by Keita for a customer. Critics have noted that European reprints of Keita's work raise interesting issues about authenticity and the photographic image, especially since there is no evidence that Keita himself approved of the ways in which his negatives were printed.

Seydou Keita's work was first brought to the attention of the European art world by Malick Sidibe, a leading photographer in Bamako. Sidibe has received critical acclaim for his own photographs of young men and women of the 1960s and 1970s, who danced, played, and posed in urban sites outside of the studio (fig. 4-29), and his success has inspired a new generation of photographers in Mali. By the late twentieth century, exhibitions of contemporary photography were being held regularly in Bamako.



4-30. *LES AMOREAUX*,
GORA M'BENGUE,
SENEGAL, 1983. INK AND
ENAMEL PAINT ON GLASS.
13 X 18 1/4" (33 X 48 CM).
COLLECTION OF MR. AND
MRS. M. RENAudeau

Photographs are easily damaged by sun, heat, and dust, and families throughout Africa have often opted for more durable painted portraits. In Senegal, Muslim families display devotional images as well as portraits in their homes. Views of Mecca, figures of holy men such as Cheik Amadou Bamba, and inscriptions from the Qur'an are often painted on glass, as are satirical and proverbial scenes criticizing misbehavior. *Les Amoureux*, a painting on glass by Gora M'bengue (1931–88), depicts a contemporary couple (fig. 4-30). The man wears typically Senegalese robes and a French pith helmet, announcing his ability to work within both worlds. His wife wears granulated gold earrings made by Wolof or Toucouleur jewelers, while her large pendant is similar to the fourteenth-century pectoral disk found in a bur-

ial near Rao. The black outlines filled in with flat, bright colors are typical of Senegalese paintings on glass.

TWENTIETH- AND TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY ART IN SENEGAL

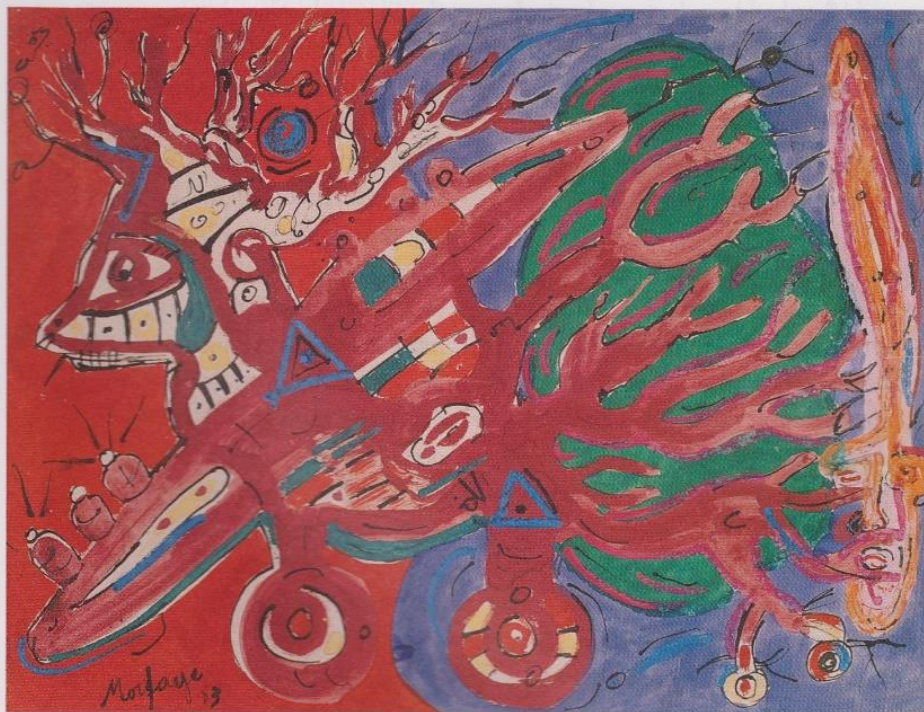
Glass painters such as Gora M'bengue, who sell their work in local markets and shops, rarely attend art school, but rather learn their trade by apprenticing themselves to established artists. Formally educated artists, in contrast, often work with the international art world in mind, with its network of galleries, museums, collectors, and critics. The art schools and institutions of Senegal flourished under the patronage of President Léopold Sédar Senghor during the two decades following its independence from France in 1960.

Perhaps the most influential artist of the Senegalese academies of this time was Papa Ibra Tall (born 1935). Tall studied painting and tapestry in France. Upon his return to Senegal, he taught at Senghor's École des Beaux-Arts in Dakar. The rhythmic, colorful images in his work were drawn from a heritage he (and the other artists working with government patronage) considered to be pan-African. Their art is sometimes described as a School of Dakar ("École de Dakar"). In 1965, Tall founded the Manufactures Nationales des Tapisseries in the town of Thies. This unusual art school and manufacturing center trained and employed a generation of artists who produced stylized images of African scenes and African art forms using imported fibers and European weaving techniques. Tall's *Royal Couple* is a masterful example



4-31. ROYAL COUPLE, PAPA IBRA TALL, THIES, SENEGAL. TAPESTRY. 7'3" x 5'1" (2.22 x 1.55 M). COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

The philosophical ideas of *Négritude* are evident in the poetic title, the mask-like figure, the simplified shapes, and the bright colors of this tapestry. *Négritude*, a philosophy espoused by Léopold Sédar Senghor, sought to build a modern Africa by drawing upon an idealized, pan-African past. Senghor believed that abstraction, rhythm, and expressive color were authentically African contributions to the world's art, music, and literature. He therefore encouraged these tendencies in Senegalese painting.



4-32. UNTITLED, MOR FAYE, SENEGAL, 1983. GOUACHE AND INDIA INK ON PAPER. 19" x 25" (50 x 65 CM). COLLECTION OF DIOKHANE AND LEE

of one of these woven wall hangings (fig. 4-31).

Iba N'Diaye (born 1928), who also studied in France, joined Papa Ibra Tall from 1959 to 1967 as a department head at the École des Beaux-Arts in Dakar. Although N'Diaye has travelled regularly between Paris and Dakar, most of his work after 1967 has been produced abroad; it will thus be discussed in chapter 15. However, the confident, swift brushwork of his layered paintings influenced several generations of students and colleagues in Senegal.

One of the most gifted artists who drew upon the legacy of Iba N'Diaye was Mor Faye (1947–85), who participated in Senghor's 1963 Festival of Negro Arts as a teenager, and eventually taught at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Dakar. Tragically, this fine artist contracted cerebral malaria, which caused him to suffer from bouts of insanity. During these episodes he destroyed his work, and he was placed in a mental institution. After his death, friends discovered that he had left over eight hundred paintings, all in an intense and personal style. One particularly vivid example appears at first glance to be a rapidly executed abstract work (fig. 4-32). Closer inspection reveals it to be an image of the Senegalese icon al-Buraq, the winged horse with the crowned head of a woman who is believed to have transported Muhammad through the night. Her wings have here become the wings of an airplane; her crown and robes are made of flames.

While few other careers ended so tragically, the 1980s were a difficult time for many Senegalese artists. When Senghor left the presidency,



4-33. *Le Vieux Nègre, la Médaille et la Statue* ("The Old Man, the Medal, and the Statue"), FODÉ CAMARA, SENEGAL, 1988. COLLAGE AND OIL ON CANVAS. 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (1.2 x 2 M). COLLECTION OF ABDOURAHIM AGNE

the country began to cut back on its investments in culture, and in the visual arts. Painters and sculptors who were accustomed to state support needed to find new venues and new forms of patronage. Some enterprising artists turned this crisis into an opportunity for creative growth. A group of artists were involved with Set Setal, an anti-corruption and "clean-up" campaign of the late 1980s. These artists and their academically trained colleagues worked with sign painters, amateurs, and children to create murals and outdoor sculpture addressing the problems of urban Senegal. In place of expensive paints and imported canvases, artists in Dakar began to use recycled objects and to explore installations and performance. Instead of exhibiting in

spaces provided by the government, the artists displayed their work in private residences or on the street, where they were visible to the urban population. By the late 1990s, national and international funding for the arts increased, and a biennial called "Dak'art" was launched. Today that exhibition, like the festivals held decades ago, features new and exciting art from many nations of the African continent.

One of the many outstanding artists who worked throughout this turbulent period was Fodé Camara (born 1958). His luminously beautiful canvases have addressed painful issues such as the slave trade. *Le Vieux Nègre, la Médaille et la Statue* ("The Old Man, the Medal, and the Statue"; fig. 4-33) explores identity

and the troubled past. Wearing the white beard and cap of an elder, the old man of the title turns to look at the statue, its face an elegant, Senufo-like mask (see fig. 5-29). Pieces of tape attach him to the canvas and seal the mask's mouth. A medal lies upon his chest. We assume that the old man is a veteran, one of the thousands of African soldiers who fought for the French in Europe and south-east Asia. His relationship to a colonial past and a pre-colonial belief system is ambiguous.

Unlike Fodé Camara, Ousmane Sow (born 1935) was not trained as an artist. He earned a university degree in France in physical therapy, which he practiced there for many years before returning to Senegal at age 50 in order to devote himself



4-34. TWO FIGURES FROM *BATTLE OF LITTLE BIG HORN*, OUSMANE SOW, SENEGAL, 1999. MIXED MEDIA. INSTALLATION IN DAKAR, SENEGAL. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

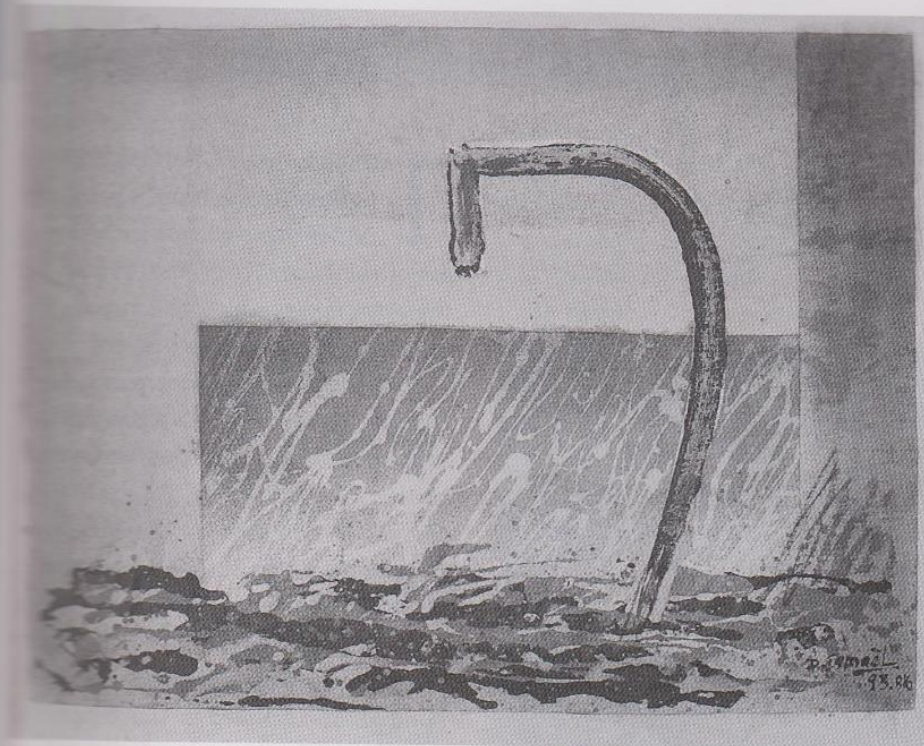
entirely to sculpture. Since his first exhibit in 1987, he has created series of muscular figures, most larger than lifesize. None are based upon his own cultural heritage. Usually the figures represent men (and some women) from places and from periods that have captured his imagination. They have included Nuba wrestlers, Maasai warriors, Fulani herders, and Zulu kings. A recent work presents scenes from the nineteenth-century American battle at Little Big Horn (fig. 4-34). His modeled and painted figures dramatically capture intense expressions, tightened muscles, and shifting centers of gravity. Their rough, organic surfaces, formed of substances whose composition Sow will not divulge, are reminiscent of Bamana *boliw*.

Artists in Bamako

The Institut National des Arts (INA) in the Malian capital, Bamako, taught students the fundamentals of Western painting in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the approaches taken by graduates of the INA have led them to new and exciting dialogues with their own artistic heritage. Ismail Diabate (born 1948), a graduate and a professor of the INA, is a founder of Mali's Association Nationale des Artistes. His art transforms the sacred signs of Bamana *jow* into more personal abstract shapes (fig. 4-35). The title of this painting (*Si Kolona*, "The Earth") reminds us of the ways numbers and seemingly simple forms in Mande arts refer to elemental principles. Diabate has worked with monotypes, and in various media. This work, however, is created with the natural dyes of *bogolan*.

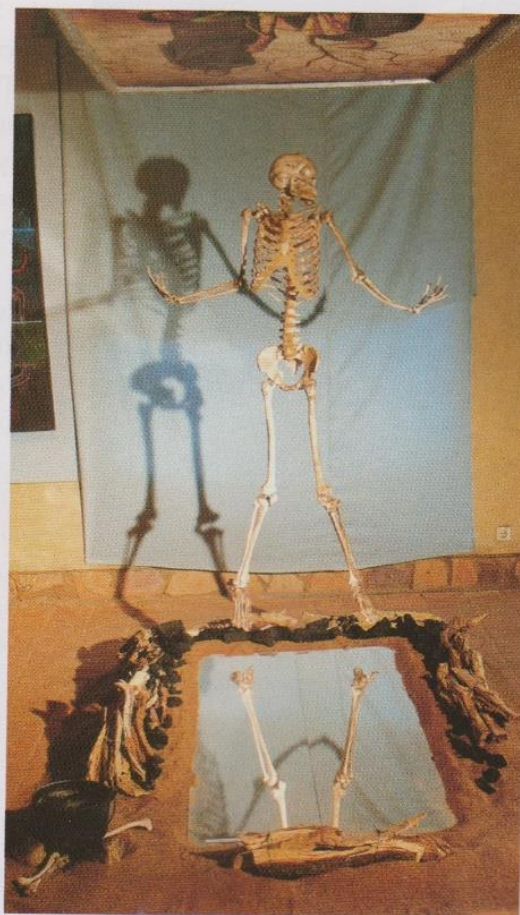
Diabate seems to have been inspired to explore this medium by a group of four young male artists, who all graduated from the INA in 1978 and went to live in a village in the Segou region in order to research the *bogolan* created by women in that community. They learned to manipulate the traditional dyes and processes of *bogolan*, and they learned to interpret the symbols displayed on the cloth. Some symbols, they have explained, refer to abstract concepts, while others recall the epic battles of historical figures such as the great Sundjata, or the nineteenth-century warrior Samory. Just as Bamana women work together to complete their *bogolan*, the young men vowed to work as a team, and to create their mud-dyed art works as a collective. They named their group Bogolan Kasobane, and they have worked together for over two decades on a variety of projects (see fig. 5-48).

Abdoulaye Konate (born 1953) also studied at the National Art Institute at Bamako, but he completed his training in Havana, Cuba. Returning to Bamako, he worked at the National Museum of Mali for many years before becoming director of the cultural center known as the Palais de Culture du Mali. Most of Konate's works are large mixed media installations addressing political and social issues. An early sculptural piece, *The Drama of the Sahel* (1991), is a memorial to the effects of the drought that devastated vast regions of Africa's Sahel in the early 1970s (fig. 4-36). As in all of his installations, Konate strives to use locally available materials and imagery, which can communicate to his fellow citizens of Mali. On many levels, his



4-35. *SI KOLOMA* ("THE EARTH"), ISMAIL DIABATE, MALI, 1972. COTTON FABRIC AND MUD DYE. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

art draws upon the Mande world's traditions of puppetry and masquerades, where social commentary and political insights are provided through large-scale, dramatic art works.



4-36. *THE DRAMA OF THE SAHEL*, ABDOULAYE KONATE, MALI, 1991. INSTALLATION. HUMAN SKELETON AND MIXED MEDIA, 126" X 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ " X 94 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (320 X 200 X 240 CM). COLLECTION OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM, BAMAKO