Components of the World (Adouron Bew)

On view in Arts of Africa gallery

Components of the World (Adouron Bew), 2007, is composed of eighty-six seemingly indistinguishable wood figures planted in a bed of red-ochre earth. Dolo carves the figures from wood he scavenges, collects, and stockpiles next to his studio. They recall the heavily worked earth. If there is not death, there is not life... The earth is to stand, to grow, to live, Dolo says. “At death, one is often buried in the earth. If there is not death, there is not life... The earth is the base.”

On view in Arts of Africa gallery

ReCollecting Dogon

The Menil Collection February 3–July 9, 2017

ReCollecting Dogon is curated by Curator of Collections Paul R. Davis. This exhibition is supported in part by Humanities Texas, the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Additional exhibition support comes from the Cultural Service of the French Embassy in Houston, Clare Casademont and Michael Metz, Janet and Paul Hobby, Susan and Francois de Menil, Franci Neely, and the City of Houston.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Of the World: In Conversation with Amahigueré Dolo

Thursday, February 16, 7:00 p.m.

Malian artist Amahigueré Dolo is joined by exhibition curator Paul R. Davis and art historian Jessica Hurd in a conversation about Dolo’s installation at the Menil and the multivalent works of Dogon visual culture in ReCollecting Dogon. Discussion in French and English.

Masks and Modernité: Dogon Now

Thursday, April 27, 7:00 p.m.

Exhibition curator Paul R. Davis presents a selection of film excerpts of danced Dogon masks and moderates a panel discussion with scholars Polly Richards and Isaïe Dougnon about the masks’ visual history and contemporary significance.

The above programs are free and open to the public. Menil members enjoy access to additional events, including a noontime gallery talk with exhibition curator Paul R. Davis on Friday, March 3.

† All quotes are from interviews with the artist conducted by Jessica Hurd between 2006 and 2011 in Segou, Mali.

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Please remember, do not touch the art.
Archival materials make visible the colonial and collecting histories of Germaine Dieterlen (1903–1999), and Mario Carrieri (b. 1932); and other decontextualized objects collected by and for Euro-Americans, the ences. Recognizing the limitations of presenting these peoples through the materiality and manipulation of objects are vital to the continuity of the continent of Africa.

Their visual culture is one of the most rich cosmology. Their visual culture is one of the most important it affirms the hunter’s proficiency in a precarious natural spectacle is a favorite photographic opportunity for tourists, but more than four million internet sites are devoted to them.

In the Bandiagara region. Hunters accumulate the skulls of their kills, and more than four million internet sites are devoted to them. The museum’s collection is exemplary of the vogue for sculpture from West Africa—works that appealed to Euro-Americans, artists, and explorers. Reflecting on the reception of art from Africa in the United States, art historian Carol Magee likened the collected object to the souvenir, a thing kept or cherished as a reminder. The term derives its meaning from the French word souvenir, which translates as “memory” or “recollection.”

A compelling example of the transmutations often generated by ethno- graphic collecting is the unassuming phonographic record in the exhibition. Included by Griaule in his 1938 thesis Des masques, Desogon, a defining figure in the European history and popular reception of the Dogon peoples, directed multiple ethno- graphic collecting expeditions to the Bandiagara region beginning with the Mission Dakar-Djibouti in 1934. His team, which included Surveillant Victor Malin (1900–1990) and etnoscientist André Schaeffer, amassed several thousand objects and popularized elaborate accounts about the peoples they encountered. Today, numerous publications, films, and exhibitions chronicle, and in some instances invent, histories of the Dogon peoples, and more than four million internet sites are devoted to them.

The collection and display of objects is an integral part of existence in the Bandiagara region. Hunters accumulate the skulls of their kills, exhibiting them embedded in the earth facing their homes. The spectacle is a favorite photographic opportunity for tourists, but more importantly it affirms the hunter’s proficiency in a precarious natural world. Interviewed about traditions of inheritance, women in the area explained, “It was important that their most treasured possessions be passed on. If I was pregnant during the hunting season, I displayed this in way [as part of the funeral].”

The waves leave boats on the beach. The child collects the shells, because to them they are beautiful and mysterious … treasures from the depth, from an unknown world. Wave after wave has brought to our shores beautiful and mysterious treasures.

This quote from Domincie de Mani’s introduction to the catalogue for a 1962 exhibition of the De Mani’s collecting culture of art from Africa, the Pacific Islands, Asia, and America at the Museum of Primitive Art in New York is an apt metaphor for the colonial history and selective processes of collecting through which the acquisition of Dogon visual culture occurred during the twentieth century. Waves transform the sandy landscape, erasing and making new, each mingling into the sands with ones deposited much earlier. The photographs, films, sound recordings, and other archival materials in ReCollecting Dogon are traces of this imperfect, evolving history.

—Paul R. Davis

NOTES
1. Jacka Bogo, “Questo e qualcosa di etnografia,” Galeria Sciencne Negro, 51 (1978). 24. Until the 1930s, most Europeans and Americans knew the Dogon peoples as the Habé. André Brochier (Aix-en-Provence, France: Association des amis des archives d’outre-mer, 1973) observed that the term “Habé” was used to name the Dogon peoples as peasants and infidels.