

Rhythm Pounder
Senufo people
Africa: Ivory Coast, Senufo people
Wood, seeds, cowry shells, 36 3/8 x 8 1/4 inches
Dallas Museum of Art, The Gustave and Franyo Schindler Collection of African Sculpture, gift of the Eugene McDermott Foundation in honor of Eugene McDermott

About the Artist/Maker

The maker of this object was one of the Senufo people who live in western Africa in Ivory Coast. The social and religious life of the Senufo is governed by the Poro, a secret male society whose aim is to preserve the traditions of the people and to lead them toward a better ethical and social life. This work is not signed by the maker, but he was probably known in his village for his ability to produce beautiful carved objects.

About the Art

Made of wood, seeds, and cowry shells, this object was produced to serve a particular function in the society. It is three dimensional, carved of wood, and was used during funeral ceremonies.

The curves of the figure can suggest to us the slow rhythmic sound of this object as it was used to strike the earth. The figure is symbolic, rather than depicting an actual female figure. Its face is mask-like, and the body is stylized into elongated, elegant shapes with long, curving arms serving as handles for the carrier who could swing the figure from side to side, slowly and rhythmically pounding the earth.

Additional Information

The female figure represented by the *Rhythm Pounder* is of a type called a “d_bl_.” The figure was used by male members of the Poro society to pound the earth during a ceremony in which large horns and drums were played. In some regions, the figures were displayed on ritual occasions with the base of the figure sunk into the ground.

About the Place

The continent of Africa is the second largest in area in the world and is the third largest in population. This continent contains many separate countries each with its own unique people, speaking different languages, and living in different environments.

The Ivory Coast is one of the countries on the west coast of Africa. It has approximately the same area as the state of New Mexico, but has almost seven times as many people. The name Ivory Coast was given to this area by French sailors in the late 1400s when they traded for ivory there. It became a French colony in 1893 and gained its independence in 1960.

Most people are farmers and live in villages. Coffee is the main crop and the second in importance is cacao seeds, the seeds from which chocolate and cocoa are made. The people in the villages live in huts that are grouped into compounds. The huts have mud walls and thatched or metal roofs. Cooking is usually done by the women in the yard.

Most inhabitants of the Ivory Coast continue to practice their ancient local religions, and the people who have moved into the cities keep close ties with their families in the villages.