

PRESS RELEASE

# Carte Blanche

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CHRISTIE'S EXHIBITION

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# INTRODUCTION

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MAY 2018

## AFRICAN FACES

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EXHIBITION

On the occasion of the exhibition organised by Christie's, Carte Blanche, in Hong Kong with two other gallery owners, Xavier Eeckhout and Robert Bowman, the didier Claes gallery will be displaying a selection of important masks. The selected ensemble includes a Chokwe mask from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an Ibibio from Nigeria, but also a rare centrepiece: a Kota mask from Gabon. Power, exaltation and discovery will be the watchwords of this exhibition that honouring "African Faces".



**IBIBIO** NIGERIA



**CHOKWE** DRC





# KOTA

## GABON (Makokou-Mékambo)

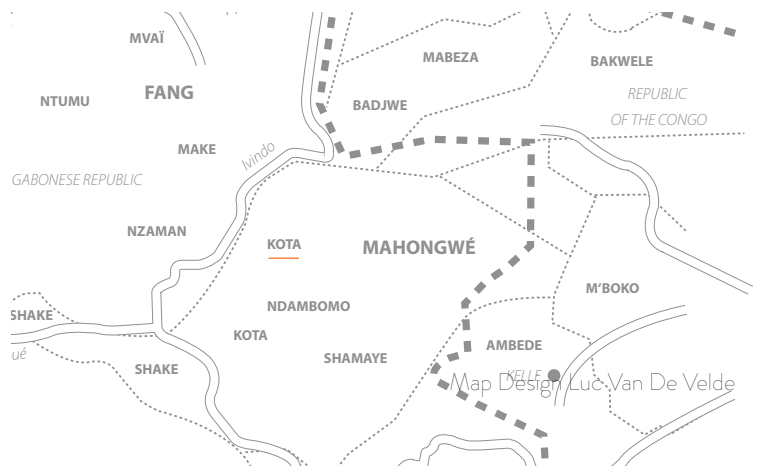
ethnic group	presumed period	dimension	material	provenance
Kota	End of 19th -Early 20th	H. 76 cm	Wood	Ancient Collection Vérité, Paris Catherine et Patrick Sargos Collection, Paris

## CONTEXT

Living in the eastern part of Gabon, the Kota include a number of tribes such as the Mahongwé, the Sango, the Obamba and the Shamayé, who practice identical rites and share cultural traits. In the past, the Kota used to leave their dead exposed to the elements in the forest. They buried their dead, then exhumed their bones to place them with other objects rich in magical powers in boxes or baskets called bwete, on which a statue was placed.



Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, Paris, n° 73.1964.4.2 <<



## MASKS

The kota masks of initiatory societies are rare and are a still unknown aspect of Kota art.

These masks were discovered in the twentieth century only among the North Kota. The example presented here comes from the village of Kota-Kota, between Makokou and Mekambo. This mask, called *emboli* or *empoli*, is a helmet mask of impressive height that was carved out of a light wood. The dancer can put his head inside and find his bearings through openings in the eyes. Because of their weight, the edges of the mask generally rested on a wickerwork crown to which it is attached by ties. The structure of the mask reflects dreamlike imagery, where animal and anthropomorphic motifs merge. The face is somewhat reminiscent of reliquaries with bulging eyes, a flat triangular nose and a rectangular mouth. Under a forehead tapered into a double-sided bow, the headpiece is crowned by a sagittal crest which is intersected by two transverse wings. The spotting symbolises the panther which represents masculine and warlike strength. The emboli masks would evoke a powerful spirit of the forest, half-man, half-gorilla. Indeed, the ridge directly recalls the sagittal crest of the male gorilla. These masks appear at community festivals and especially during the initiation rites of young satsi people.

## PUBLICATIONS

- Louis Perrois, *Visions d'Afrique*, 5 Continents Ed., 2012 : 59
- Sargos Catherine & Patrick, *Arts et traditions d'Afrique du profane au sacré*, Coll. Hazan, Paris, 2010, p.190, fig.5.4







# IBIBIO

## NIGERIA

ethnic group	presumed period	dimension	material	provenance
Lwalwa	End of 19th -Early 20th	H. 33 cm	Wood	Marcia & Irwin Hersey collection, New York Sotheby's Auction Sale, New York, 1987, lot 33 Private Collection, Belgium

## CONTEXT

The Ibibio live in southwest Nigeria. « Their villages are led by a chief elected from the most honourable heads of the important families and Ibibio [...] social life is regulated by three secret societies which incorporate masks into their annual ceremonies. The most important of these societies is the Ekpo, which is responsible for the cult of the ancestors, who are in turn responsible for the welfare of the tribe. In Ibibio ceremonies, two main types of mask appear. The first, known as Mfon, has an articulated jaw and represents a 'beautiful' spirit who has attained eternal bliss. The second mask, called Idiok, is thought to represent a hell-dwelling spirit.»

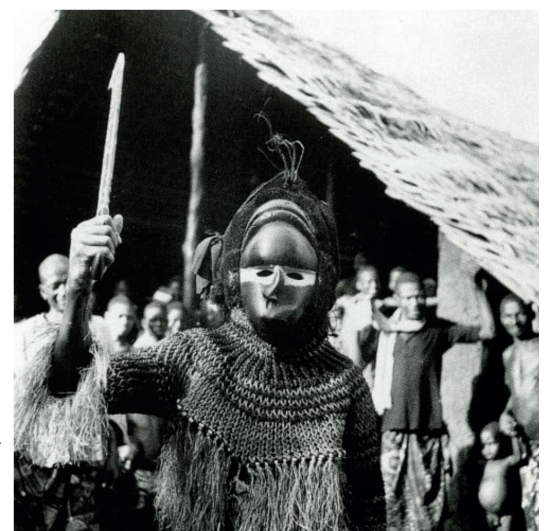
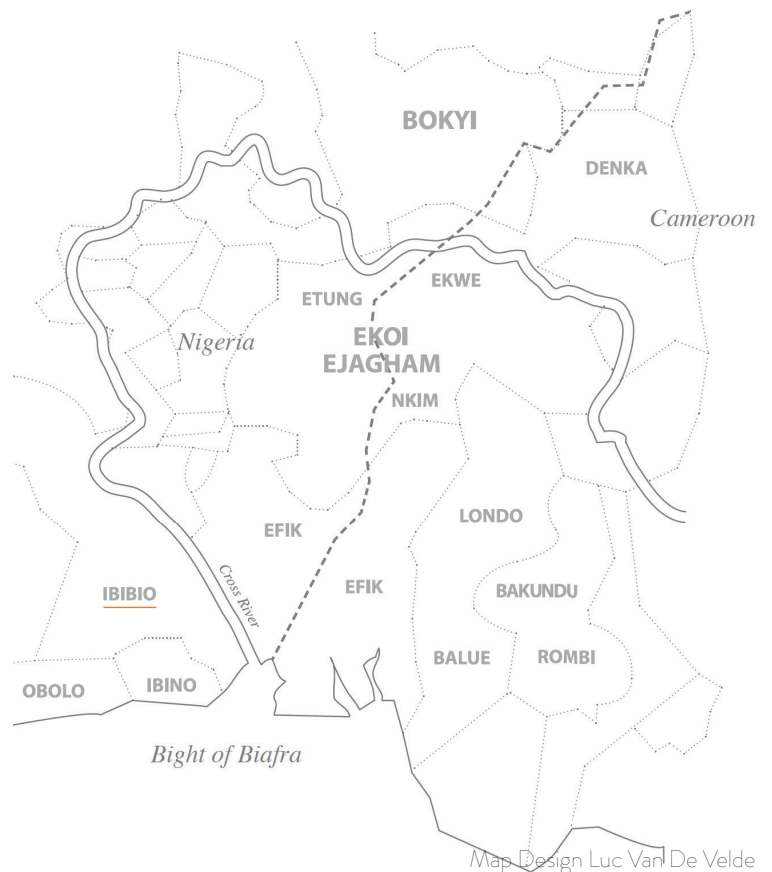
source : L'Art Tribal d'Afrique Noire, JB Bracquart, Thames & Hudson, 1997

## MASKS

Endowed with an extraordinary face, this mask has a quite emaciated appearance, nearly skin and bone. The maxillary line follows the contour of the bone and seems absolutely fleshless. The extremely hollow orbits, the depression serving as nose, and the rictus of the slightly opened mouth, are obviously indicative of the image of death. But it may be, in this case, a reference to diseases which afflict the area, like leprosy or tropical ulcers, that disfigure the face and which the Ibibio have the habit of representing through pathological masks. Ekpo (read above) means «ancestor», and through the masking institution one again sees of widespread concept of spirits' beneficial involvement in human affairs. They serve as relays between the world of the living and that of the ancestors.

source : African Faces, African Figures, The Arman Collection, 1997

Field photo (1984): Ekpe (Egbo) figure. In Ekpe (Egbo) costume >>  
and Anant (Ibibio) pathological mask. Uzuakoli village. Isu/Item Igbo.  
Published : Jones (G.I.), *The art of Eastern Nigeria*, Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press, 1984:181, #90









# CHOKWE

## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

ethnic group	presumed period	dimension	material	provenance
Chokwe	End of 19th -Early 20th	H. 27 cm	Wood, pigments	Arman Fernandez collection, New York Simone de Monbrison gallery, Paris Hy Zareit collection, Boston Private collection, Belgium

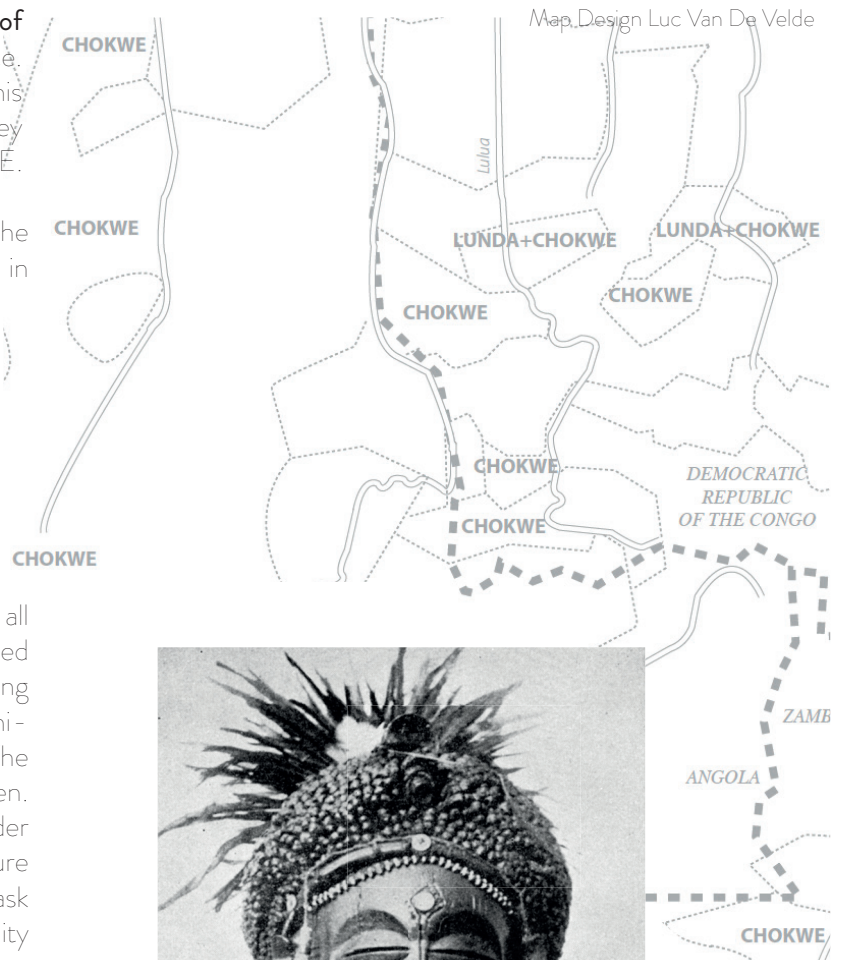
## CONTEXT

In the 15th century in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Queen Lunda married a Luba prince. A number of notable Lunda disapproved of this marriage and migrated south, in Angola. They founded several kingdoms including the CHOKWE.

Around 1860, following a great famine, the Chokwe migrated again south and they settled in the Sierra de Musamba.

## MASKS

This two female mask, carved in wood, shows all characteristics of the two mask : half-closed almond eyes, arched eyebrows meeting almost above concave orbits, detailed semi-circular ears and patterns of scarification. The two mask, although feminine, was worn by men. It can represent the woman in general, under caricature or secretly of a beloved, as to ensure the strong link between the owner of the mask and one of his ancestors. The mask sows fertility where it dances.



photographed between 1940 -1950 >>  
Postcard: no.767 - Danseur Katshokwe (Sandoa).Postcard

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