

# African artifacts offer clues to Western art

Story: HELEN ZUCKER  
Photos: JACK ZUCKER

The new show at Meadow Brook Gallery marks the first time the Oakland University collection of Pre-Columbian, Mexican, ancient Peruvian sculpture and pottery, and the G. Mennan Williams African Art and Antiquities have been accumulated, cataloged and displayed together.

To see the show is to learn much about the art producing tribes of West Africa.

African art is the ancestor of Cubism. It's intense work and one comes away understanding why Picasso and Braque were impressed by African masks. The hard, blocky outlines, varying triangular planes, and surfaces decorated without regard for Western notions of perspective strike an instant chord of recognition.

Up to now, it's our culture that has borrowed much—artistically speaking—from its African neighbor. The fact that the tide seems to be turning gives the show a double-edged poignancy and power. Puro masks, fertility symbols, headdresses, and animal associations may never be produced as articles of daily life again—now that the Ivory Coast has taken to reading Wonder Woman. One blinks at the swiftness with which a culture can change.

**MOST OF THE COLLECTION** comes from the Mende, Baule, Senufo, Bambara, Ashanti, Dogon, Baga, Lobi, Songe and Yoruba tribes which spread out along the Ivory Coast, and inward toward the Niger River.

All of the tribes believe in the supernatural, natural deities, ancestor worship, legendary heroes, magic, medicine, spirits, and forms of worship that help create stable lives in hunting and gathering and agricultural societies.

The variety of designs and shapes tells us of differences in styles of worship, carvings and finish indicate what legends most influence a particular tribe.

A Yoruba fertility doll called an akua-ba looks uncannily like a Paul

Klee drawing—until one remembers that Klee, like Picasso and Braque, borrowed from the Africans. Klee's "Death and Fire" painting is a composite of Yoruba faces—primal faces shaped from clay and dreams. A strange thrill of recognition goes up at the sight of small, stick-like, "image figures used to draw medicines" from the animal, vegetable, and mineral world.

Some of the most graceful and accessible works are the antelope masks made by the Bambara people of the Mali Republic. The Bambara are farmers and their most important ceremonies deal with planting and harvesting. The people celebrate seasonal rites wherein they seek the benediction of gods who have taken on the guise of animals.

Chi-Wara is the mythical antelope who first advised the Bambara on soil

fertility. Dancers at the celebrations wear enormous, elegant masks that look like Chi-Wara, the antelope god. Their dances express the swift movements of the antelope. In this way they ask for plentiful harvests.

**GAZELLES, ANCESTRAL FIGURES** and rare vessels (no longer made), with covers in the form of abstract, horned animal heads, as well as masks used in harvest ceremonies are on display, but antelope masks are the most frequent symbol used in Bambara rituals.

The strongest, and perhaps least accessible, works are in the collection of 12 puro masks. The most important role of these strong, secret societies—of which the masks are a symbol—was the separate education of male and female leading to final admission into adult society.

Behind one of the electrifying

masks, the wearer was free to hide his identity from others. He could feel free from the frustration of what he's supposed to be until ready to assume the role. With the mask he could revert to what he is, or be something different—in short, become the identity of the mask in time. Every mask is different, but it's all highly-charged work.

The Tribal Arts Show, works collected by former Governor G. Mennan Williams over a period of years, runs through Jan. 29. Williams made a gift of his exceptionally fine collection to Oakland University during the early '50s.

Gifts from Mr. and Mrs. Ernst Anspach of New York, and Harry Baber of New York University round out the show of works from Oakland University's permanent collection.

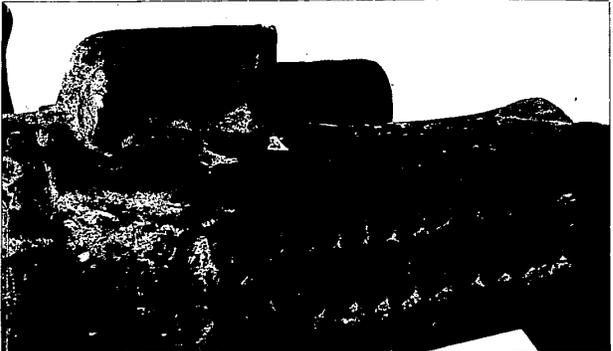
During 1977, before the rare Japanese print show, controlled-humidity

display cases were installed in Meadow Brook Gallery. The cases are permanent and because of them the gallery was finally able to bring the "Tribal Arts" collection together.

Meadow Brook Gallery is in Wilson

Hall on the campus. Hours are 1-5 p.m., Tuesday through Friday.

A second show from the university's permanent collection—recent acquisitions, modern prints and paintings—will go up in early February.



Crocodile sculpture came from West Africa.



Senufo ritual mask is made of wood and raffia.

## Evidence slows death probe

By JOE MARTUCCI

Lt. Curtis Grennier of the Bloomfield Township police department has a hunch he will some day discover who murdered Cynthia Cadieux.

But whether that person—or persons—is ever arrested and brought to trial is another matter. The problem with the two-year-old murder case is that police have little evidence.

Miss Cadieux, 16, was found on Franklin Road near Fourteen Mile in Bloomfield Township at 1:30 a.m. Jan. 16, 1976. The body of the Roseville High School student was nude. Tests showed that Miss Cadieux had been sexually molested and had died of a skull fracture caused by a blow to the head.

Two years later, police have no prime suspects and have been unable to uncover a motive for the slaying. But they haven't given up. The case remains open, with Roseville and Bloomfield Township police continuing the investigation.

Lt. Grennier said 200-300 persons have been interviewed and several suspects cleared through lie detector tests. At one time, there were a dozen detectives assigned to the case.

"Anybody we could reasonably suspect in this area has been cleared. Bloomfield Township was just the dumping ground," said Grennier.

"ROSEVILLE is constantly probing. They've done a good job, and they've been persistent."

"We feel we have been able to make minimal progress. Sometimes you feel you've progressed a step farther when you've eliminated somebody."

But we've never been able to come up with any concrete suspects."

Grennier said police may eventually know who is responsible for the murder because he thinks there was more than one person involved.

Although there solid evidence is lacking, Grennier said circumstances point to involvement of more than one person.

For one thing, the position of the victim's body indicated that she had been shoved out of a vehicle—possibly a van. If only one person were involved, he would have had to slip the vehicle, get out, remove the body, get back in and continue driving.

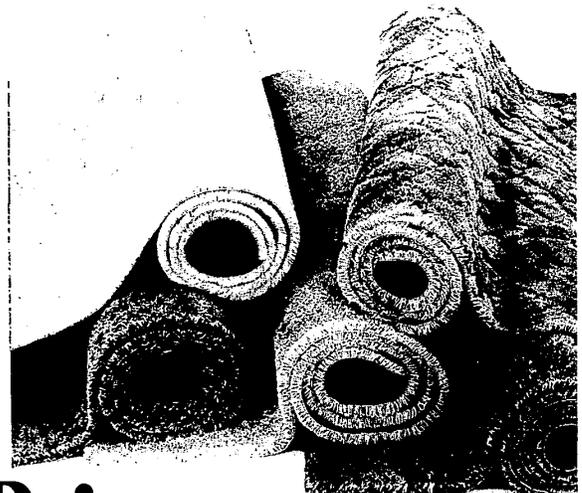
Grennier considers this scenario unlikely for someone not wanting to be seen.

Secondly, Miss Cadieux was big for her age—nearly 5'9" and about 140 pounds. Grennier said she would have been strong enough to give one man a struggle.

"I think there was more than one person involved. I don't know for sure, but I would hope so because this would give us a witness. If there was only one person, all he has to do is keep quiet. If there were more than one, there's always a chance somebody will blow the whistle and say, 'I was there, but I didn't know what was going to happen,'" Grennier theorized.

Miss Cadieux left her Roseville home about 7 p.m. on Jan. 15 and walked a short distance to a party store on Eleven Mile near Gratiot. From there she walked to a friend's house, where she stayed for a short time.

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