




Non-Western Art History

Exploring the Visual Arts of The Benin Kingdom of Africa

End

1 Cultural Context - Africa Art 244





Africa

End

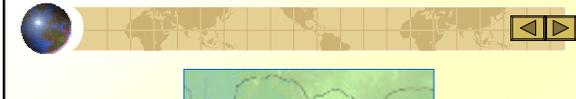
2 Cultural Context - Africa Art 244





End

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✦ The Kingdom of Benin

- ◆ Current kings trace their origins to the 14th century; the Queen Mother is also politically important
- ◆ Was a powerful kingdom from 14th through late 19th century
- ◆ Had many client states that sent tribute, including artworks
- ◆ Gained wealth from conquest and trade with neighboring kingdoms and Europeans
- ◆ Traded European manila (plant fibers for paper) and guns for ivory, pepper and palm oil
- ◆ Vibrant urban culture in the capital and other cities controlled by the royal family

End

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✦ Art in the Kingdom of Benin

- ◆ The *Oba*, king, commissioned artworks to show his power and prestige
- ◆ Royal portraits were an important focus of royal ancestral shrines
- ◆ Artworks contained many religious symbols, since the king was also the spiritual leader
- ◆ Other members of the royal family and powerful chiefs commissioned artworks for status and ritual ceremonies honoring their clan and lineage
- ◆ The king sponsored royal workshops where master artists supervised apprentices

End

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Cultural Context - Africa Art 244

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End



Altar Tableau: Queen Mother and Attendants.
H: 13.5 inches. 18th century,
Unknown Benin Artist, Nigeria,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Head of an Oba.
H: 9.25 inches, Brass
16th century,
Unknown Benin Artist,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Head of an Oba, 18th century,
H: 13 inches,
Unknown Benin Artist,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Head of An Oba,
H: 18 inches, 19th century,
Unknown Benin Artist,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Benin Ancestor Altar,
Photo by Elliott Elifson, 1970
U. S. Library of Congress

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Benin Ancestor Altar,
Photo by Elliott Elifson, 1970
U. S. Library of Congress

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Altar of the Hand,
Unknown Benin Artist,
Late 19th century,
The British Museum

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End



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Altar of the Hand,
Unknown Benin Artist,
Late 19th century,
The British Museum

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Bracelets: Crocodile Heads, Brass and Gilt, L: 5.25 inches.
17th - 19th century, Unknown Benin Artist,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

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22

Mudfish Stool, Unknown Benin Artist,
Africa, 16th century,
National Museum, Lagos

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End



23

Warrior Chief and Attendants, 16th century,
Unknown Benin Artist, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Cultural Context - Africa Art 244

End



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Warrior Chief and Attendants,
H: x. 16th century,
Unknown Benin Artist,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Cultural Context - Africa Art 244

End



25 Cultural Context - Africa Art 244

Salt Cellar: Portuguese Figures.
H: 7.5 inches, Ivory,
Unknown Benin Artist,
15th-16th century,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

End



26 Cultural Context - Africa Art 244

Salt Cellar: Portuguese Figures.
H: 7.5 inches, Ivory,
Unknown Benin Artist,
15th-16th century,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

End



27 Cultural Context - Africa Art 244

Leopard Aquamanile, Bronze, H: 17 inches.
18th century, Unknown Benin Artist,
Minneapolis Institute of Art

End

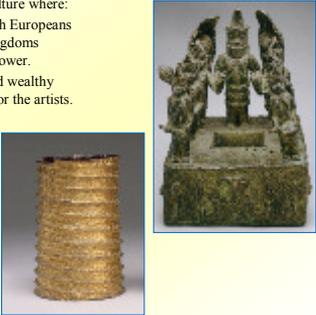


28 Cultural Context - Africa Art 244

◆ Benin artists lived in a culture where:

- ◆ Politics: the government was centered at the king's palace.
- ◆ The king commissioned royal regalia to emphasize his power.
- ◆ Religion: was based on ancestor worship and the king was the spiritual leader.

End

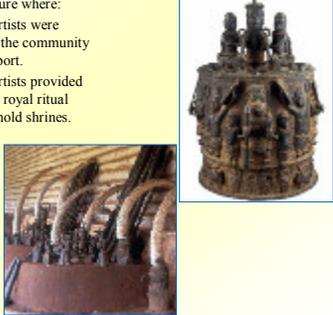


29 Cultural Context - Africa Art 244

◆ Benin artists lived in a culture where:

- ◆ Economics: trade with Europeans and other African kingdoms brought wealth and power.
- ◆ Economics: kings and wealthy chiefs were patrons for the artists.

End



30 Cultural Context - Africa Art 244

◆ Benin artists lived in a culture where:

- ◆ Social Organization: artists were important members of the community and enjoyed royal support.
- ◆ Social Organization: artists provided important artworks for royal ritual ceremonies and household shrines.

End



- ✦ Benin artists lived in a culture where:
 - Artistic Influences: artists in royal workshops where masters trained apprentices.
 - Artistic Influences: artworks were prominently displayed in the king's palaces and warriors' homes.
 - Artistic Influences: patrons could see the creations of many artists on a daily basis.



End



- ✦ Benin artists lived in a culture where:
 - International Influences: Merchants in Benin traded with many other African kingdoms, bringing new ideas to their culture.
 - International Influences: Portuguese and British merchants bought slaves and gold from Benin; images of the traders were incorporated into status artworks.
 - International Influences: European craftsmen lived and worked in the cities of Benin where local artists could see their work and learn from them.



End