



Staff (Oshe Shango)

Date

early 20th century

Primary Maker

Nigeria, Yoruba people

Medium

wood and pigment

Description

Perhaps the most frequently occurring form in Yoruba art is the kneeling female devotee. While the kneeling woman is the ideal image of selfless devotion to a higher spiritual power the image also conveys the powers inherent in woman herself. She is the major vessel containing life force, ashe. She regularly gives up ashe in the form of blood at menstruation, signaling fertility, and in childbirth, a vivid demonstration of her power to give life. Lactation, signaled by her full breasts, demonstrates the nurturing power of woman. Contrarily childbirth may be associated with death. The loss of fluids from the body, especially in men in contrast to women, also suggests pain and danger. Woman, therefore, is a most potent symbol of devotion and of life and death, powers evoked, celebrated, and placated elsewhere in Yoruba life in the Gelede masquerade festival.

Dimensions

Overall: 21 3/8 x 4 1/4 x 3 1/4 in. (54.3 x 10.8 x 8.3 cm)