



Standing figure

Not on display

Title/Description: Standing figure

Born: 1900 - 1999

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Wood

Measurements: h. 146 x w. 64 x d. 60 mm

Accession Number: 248

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Africa, Central African Republic

Cultural Group: Zande

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

The Zande, belonging to the Nile-Congo watershed group of communities, live over a large area including south-west Sudan, north-east Zaire, and the southern part of the Central African Republic. Their woodcarvings fall into two groups, one of which includes realistic figures and bow harps with human heads. The other group, of which this is an example, are less elaborately carved and were made for the rites of the Mani secret society. The austere treatment of the human form is akin to that of Lega figures (cf. 603).

The Mani secret society began about the end of the nineteenth century in western Zande country, perhaps as a reaction to colonialisation. Mani was a sort of mutual aid society, with rituals to invoke protection, bring good fortune or avert bad luck. Adepts met at night in the forest; they made and used small figures. *Yanda* (also meaning 'spirit' or 'force'), which were made out of clay or the wood of special sacred trees. A *yanda* figure needed to be properly inaugurated to nullify any negative forces and to imbue it with the right sort of spiritual power. The ceremony was carried out before the group leader, two witnesses and the future owner, who from then on had to look after it, feed it and give it presents. It lived in a hut with the other *yanda* figures. This asexual figure is called *Nazeze* ('with legs') and is illustrated by Brüssens (1962: pl. X, fig. 102).

At certain Mani assemblies, a special gruel, *libele*, was decocted out of a mixture of roots, bark, seeds, oil, salt and water; this *libele* and a powder, *mbagu*, were used to anoint *yanda* figures as an offering and to reinforce their power. The crusty surface of this figure is the result. Mani adepts also rubbed *libele* on themselves because it was a very powerful magical remedy. *Yanda* figures helped

towards success in hunting, promoted fruitfulness in mankind, animals and plants, brought about favourable results in lawsuits and averted ill-luck generally. On the negative side, *yanda* figures could be used as agents in sorcery to cause illness or even death, but since payment was required in the form of the victim's heart or liver, this may not have happened too often.

Mani, like many other secret societies, was not favourably regarded by the Government and became something of an underground movement. Mani cells tended to form wherever large enough groups of Zande lived, even where far outside Zande country proper.

Margaret Carey, 1997

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 214.

Provenance

Carved in the Rafaï district, Central African Republic.

Collected by Dr J. de Loose in the Bangui area in 1954. Dr de Loose was a Medical officer in the Lower Welle region from 1952 - 56.

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from H. Reisser in 1963.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
