



Male figure

Not on display

Title/Description: Male figure

Born: 1850 - 1899

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Wood

Measurements: h. 317 x w. 60 x d. 85 mm

Accession Number: 263

Historic Period: 19th century - Mid/Late

Production Place: Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo

Cultural Group: Luluwa

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

The Luluwa have an ethnically diverse origin arising out of migrations, invasions and fusions with groups of slaves. Their distinctive and extensive body scarification was a means of establishing identity and is striking feature of their figure carving.

While Luluwa masks have some characteristics in common with the art of the neighbouring Kuba, their figures are *sui generis*, even where the cicatrisation is less than extensive here. This carving is a type called *mbulenga* and is a charm to bring fortune and beauty. At the birth of a child, magic ingredients mixed with kaolin were placed in the little cup in *mbulenga's* left hand as an offering to bring good luck and beauty to the child. *Mbulenga* figures were 'fed' by having food placed on the spiked head-dress, and they might be rubbed with red camwood powder and oil (*tukula*) to strengthen their magical power.

The making of *mbulenga* lapsed for a while after the Luluwa migration in the 1880s: later carvings have less extensive surface decoration.

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. 139.

Provenance

Acquired by Henri A. Kamer by exchange from the Musée Ritauri [sic], Belgium.

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from Henri A. Kamer in 1968.

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