



Cosmetic box

Not on display

Title/Description: Cosmetic box

Born: 1800 c. - 1950 c.

Measurements: h. 80 x w. 260 x d. 120 mm

Accession Number: 530

Historic Period: 19th century, 20th century

Boxes for camwood powder (*ngedi mu ntey*) are among the pleasantest and most typical pieces of Kuba domestic art. Camwood comes from the heartwood of the *mulombwa* tree, which occurs over most of central Africa. When ground to a fine powder and mixed with castor oil it makes a paint that is widely used in the Congo Basin area as a cosmetic or dye.

Among the Kuba, this cosmetic is called *tukula* or *twool* and it is mixed in the inverted lid of the camwood powder box. The top of the box is decorated with a mask and bordered with the interlace patterns which so reflect the Kuba love of surface pattern: similar designs surround the sides of the box. The crescentic shape recalls the half-moon phase in the lunar cycle, traditionally the time of greatest fecundity in women.

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. 197.

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from K. J. Hewett in 1973.

Accessioned into the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia circa 1989.
