



Standing female figure

Not on display

Title/Description: Standing female figure

Born: 1850 c. - 1950 c.

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Glass, Wood

Measurements: h. 205 x w. 162 x d. 62 mm

Accession Number: 567

Historic Period: 19th century, 20th century

Production Place: Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo

Cultural Group: Kongo, Yombe

Many carvings from the Yombe or Kongo cultural groups exhibit a considerable degree of realism, as this little figure shows. This may be the result of prolonged contact with Europeans and their attitude to representation: since the late fifteenth century, Portuguese, French, Dutch and English traders have visited the old kingdom of Kongo. Christianity was introduced early in this period, which may explain why naturalism in the head combines with hieratic stiff attitudes in the rest of the body; here the palms are turned outwards in an unusual pose.

'Descending perspective' is clearly in evidence from the head, measuring one third of the total height, diminishing in scale down to the tiny feet. The piece of mirror in the belly shows that this is a *nkisi* figure. A piece of mirror was a device to ward off malign influences in much the same way as an amalgam of medicine: in some *nkisi* a fragment of mirror might seal in a lump of medicine.

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. 183.

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from Merton D. Simpson, New York in 1974.

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