



Standing figure

Not on display

Title/Description: Standing figure

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Wood

Measurements: h. 530 x w. 105 mm

Accession Number: 684b

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Africa, Côte d'Ivoire

Cultural Group: Baule

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1977

An undocumented single Baule figure, whether male or female, may have to be labelled 'purpose unknown' owing to doubt whether it was intended as a representation of a 'spirit spouse' (female if the owner is a man and vice versa) or of a bush spirit (*asien usu*). The reason is that spirit-spouse images are kept by tradition in the best possible conditions (so as to please the spirits), whereas the bush spirits are content with the most rudimentary attentions, and in general their figures are left in the dirt and given no place of honour. If, on the other hand, two figures (male and female) have been found together, in conditions which make it clear to the practised eye that they were made at the same time and have remained together ever since, then this is the rare case where the diviner (who is, of course, consulted in all cases of visitation, whether by spirit spouses or by bush spirits) has prescribed exceptionally the use of two *asien usu*. In such a case, we know that the couple represent bush spirits, even if they have lost all the dirt with which they were once encrusted. These two figures, therefore, are among the very few Baule statues of which it can be said that we know for certain the purpose to which they were devoted.

Traces of dirt or of offerings are visible on both figures; the termite erosion on the feet also indicates that the figures were not looked after as carefully as spirit-spouse figures would have been.

Vogel (1981: 73) writes that bush or nature spirits and their representations are less numerous than those of spirit spouses, and that they may require their human companion to become a professional medium and conduct divinations for clients while in a trance.

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. 133.

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from K. J. Hewett in 1977 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.
