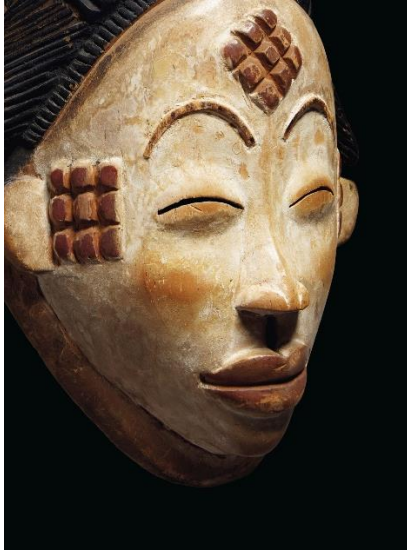


CHRISTIE'S

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ART OF AFRICA MASTERWORKS



A PUNU MASK, OKUYI
GABON
Height: 13 in. (33 cm.)
Estimate: USD 250,000 – USD 350,000



A BLACKENED PUNU MASK, IKWARA
GABON
Height: 12 in. (30.5 cm.)
Estimate: USD 250,000 – USD 350,000

New York – Christie's is pleased to announce the Art of Africa Masterworks sale, which will take place on May 14, 2019 in New York. The auction is an exceptional sale featuring nine masterworks of African Art and will coincide with Christie's 20th Century Week sales.

A celebration of female strength, fertility, and beauty, this sale offers works of art that showcase the powerful influence of women in 19th century African culture. The works once performed important functions surrounding universal themes of social unity, protection, fertility of the land and by natural extension the people. A unique and diverse compilation of figures and masks featuring rare artistry from West and Central Africa. The nine masterworks carry old and distinguished provenances, which is further enhanced by their exhibition histories and published literature.



THE WALSCHOT-SCHOFFEL KIFWEBE MASK
ATTRIBUTED TO A SONGYE MASTER ARTIST
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
Height: 14 8/5 in. (37 cm.)
ESTIMATE ON REQUEST

Highlights from the Art of Africa sale to include:

The Walschot-Schoffel Kifwebe mask attributed to a Songye Master Artist is the most beautiful and important example of this type of mask to come to market. Through the sculptor's use of powerful proportion and the waves of graphic lines, the mask creates an optical illusion that can be perceived as hypnotic. Known in the Congo as a supernatural being, female masks were linked to lunar rites, appeared on the occasion of a chief's death and played an integral role by animating benevolent spirit forces through dance. For the Songye, white symbolizes beauty, reproductive strength, health, purity, goodness, joy, peace, and the attainment of wisdom. The white pigment is made with clay brought from river beds, which is crushed and dried into a powder. The use of white clay from rivers and forests seem to activate the female mask physically, linking its

symbolic representation to the sacred ancestral environment. The *Kifwebe* type of mask is the most iconic in all African artistry and has inspired and compelled artist of the 20th century and appears prominently in the works of Alexander Calder and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

The two top lots of this sale, including ***the Walschot-Schoffel Kifwebe mask attributed to a Songye Master Artist and the Bamana Ntomo Mask attributed to the Proto-Ségou Master*** are rare works that are fresh to the market and were once in the Jeanne Walschot (1896-1977) collection. Susan Kloman, International Department Head of African and Oceanic Art, remarked: “She’s legendary. Jeanne Walschot was a pioneering female collector of art on a grand scale. Through her extraordinary collection she championed African art and drew the radical members of the French intelligentsia into her orbit, most notably the Surrealists Tristan Tzara, André Breton and Max Ernst.’



JEANNE WALSCHCOT (1896-1977) WAS ONE OF THE FIRST AND FEW WOMEN TO BECOME A DEALER AND COLLECTOR OF AFRICAN ART. WALSCHCOT OPENED HER FIRST GALLERY IN 1923.

Sculptors mastered the art to extraordinary levels, with each carved mask telling a unique story.

A Bamana Ntomo Mask attributed to the Proto – Ségou Master is another masterwork in the sale, which was in the collection of Jeanne Walschot. *Ntomo* masks of the Bamana people of Mali are complex mask sculptures that were used during initiation ceremonies. This mask offers a unique combination of a human face with crested horns and boldly incorporates the powerful symbolism of a female figure – in this instance, the primordial woman. The crest represents the bountiful field of wheat or stalks of grass while the woman, with her feet and hands joining the horizon, denotes the fertility of the land and the people. The ultimate teaching of *Ntomo* and other initiation practices – to grant a state of physical and mental balance necessary for a good life in society.

The Grebo / Kru Mask from Liberia is another exceptional piece, which had transformative powers and helped energize the innovative artists of the twentieth century to rethink the representational character of art. This type of mask with projecting tubular eyes and facial features inspired Pablo Picasso to create his radical innovation of the Cubist Guitar sculpture. Only a few Kru masks like this are known, the inclusion of multiple eyes likely signifies the gift of clairvoyance, as such this mask embodies and formally represents the ability to access the unseen.

The Chokwe Ensemble is made of finely woven fiber, and the use of different colors woven into the fabric creates an intricate design. According to Chokwe tradition in Angola, boys were required to undergo a period of seclusion away from village life that could last up to a year. This life-sized costume was worn during the initiation ceremonies of young Chokwe boys as they graduate into adulthood.

Women with the force to unite, protect and heal societies.

The Guro Mask Representing Gu reflects the characteristics of ideal beauty the Guro in the Ivory Coast. In Guro cultural practice of the last century, the mythical woman, or idealized ancestress, *Gu*, is described as never leaving the grove alone and always accompanies her husband or father. *Gu* is said to protect young wives from any ill will on the part of the family to which they have married. Similarly, the **Punu Mask, Okuyi** is said to invoke spirits from the underworld that were incarnated as a beautiful young woman and correspond to some of the highest ideals of feminine charm. These masks are a testament to the grace and power of the Punu women. The white mask, from Southern Gabon, have become characteristic of African arts since the end of the 19th century. The *Okuyi* dance, which gave its name to these masks, brought the community together for significant events and restored order after a crisis. Juxtaposed to the white Punu Mask is the extremely rare **Blackened Punu Mask, Ikwara**. There are less than a handful known of the black type, which was thought to be surrounded by secrecy. These “masks of the night” were worn during nocturnal rituals and represent the upholders of the law. They evoked fear as the spirit would only come out in the darkness.

For related content, please refer to our [5 minutes with... A 19th- century Congolese Kifwebe Mask](#)

SELECT HIGHLIGHTS:



**A BAMANA NTOMO MASK
ATTRIBUTED TO THE
PROTO - SÉGOU MASTER
MALI**

Height: 26 in. (66 cm.)
ESTIMATE: USD 300,000 – USD 500,000



**A GREBO/ KRU MASK
LIBERIA**

Height: 27 ¼ in. (70.5 cm.)
ESTIMATE: USD 200,000 – USD 300,000



**A GURO MASK REPRESENTING GU
IVORY COAST**

Height: 10 ½ in. (27 cm.)
ESTIMATE: USD 180,000 – USD 250,000



**A CHOKWE ENSEMBLE
ANGOLA**

Height: 65 in. (165 cm.)
ESTIMATE: USD 30,000 – USD 50,000

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About Christie's

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Alongside regular sales online, Christie's has a global presence in 46 countries, with 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, and Shanghai.

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**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and are reported net of applicable fees.*

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