Finch & Co



CENTRAL AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO KANYOK PEOPLES 'NKISI' FIGURE IN THE FORM OF A HERMAPHRODITE

A CENTRAL AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO KANYOK PEOPLES 'NKISI' FIGURE IN THE FORM OF A HERMAPHRODITE

WEARING A GLASS TRADE BEAD NECKLACE A CAVITY TO THE TOP OF THE HEAD

LATE 19TH – EARLY 20TH CENTURY

SIZE: 19.5CM HIGH - 7¾ INS HIGH / 24.5CM HIGH - 9¾ INS HIGH (WITH BASE)

LITERATURE

THE KANYOK PEOPLE ARE THE LUBA'S PRINCIPAL NEIGHBOURS IN THE REGION OF KASAI AND BOTH MEN AND WOMEN WEAR AN ELABORATE HAIRSTYLE CONSISTING OF TWO SPHERICAL KNOTS THAT LIE NEXT TO EACH OTHER ON THE NAPE OF THE NECK. THIS FIGURE IS EXPLICITLY BOTH MALE AND FEMALE WITH A PENIS AND BREASTS. HERMAPHRODITISM OCCURS IN THE SCULPTURE OF SEVERAL AFRICAN PEOPLES TO EXPRESS PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS ABOUT GENDER AND SOCIAL HARMONY. GENDER AND POWER ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED IN BOTH THE LUBA AND KANYOK WORLD. MALE AND FEMALE ELEMENTS MERGE IN THE EXERCISE OF LEADERSHIP WHERE MEN ENACT THE VISIBLE, OVERT SIDE OF POWER AND WOMEN ASSUME THE COVERT, SECRET SIDE OF THE SAME PROCESS.

THIS FIGURE WAS PROBABLY SCULPTED TO BE USED AS A NKISI, WITH SUBSTANCES SUCH AS A FRAGMENT OF HUMAN BONE OR THE HAIR OF TWINS PUT INTO THE CAVITY IN THE HEAD. BY THUS ENHANCING THE FIGURE, THE SPIRIT IS INVITED TO INHABIT IT AND CAN THEN BE ASKED TO ASSIST WITH PARTICULAR TASKS. THE FIGURE WILL USUALLY TAKE THE NAME OF AN INDIVIDUAL SPIRIT WHO WILL HAVE SPECIALISED CAPABILITIES SUCH AS THE DETECTION OF THIEVES, THE CURING OF INFERTILITY, REVEALING PROPHECY THROUGH DREAMS, AND ASSURING GENERAL WELL BEING.