

# *Finch & C°*



**A SOUTH EASTERN CONGO, ZAIRE SONGYE PROTECTIVE FETISH FIGURE 'NKISHI' OF GEOMETRIC FORM**

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THE ARMS PLACED TO THE SIDE, PLUG OF FETISH MATERIAL IN THE HEAD CAVITY A STRIP OF OLD HIDE AND FUR AROUND THE WAIST

OLD SMOOTH CRUSTED PATINATION

WOOD, FUR, MATERIAL

SOUTH EASTERN CONGO, ZAIRE

19TH CENTURY – EARLY 20TH CENTURY

SIZE: 20CM HIGH – 8 INS HIGH / 29.5CM HIGH, 11½ INS HIGH (INCLUDING STAND)

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#### LITERATURE

THE FACE OF THIS PROTECTIVE FIGURE IS TYPICAL OF THE STRONG ANGULARITY OF SONGYE CARVING. AMONGST THE SONGYE, 'NKISHI' WERE ASSOCIATED WITH A MAGICO-RELIGIOUS SOCIETY KNOWN AS 'BUKISI' WHICH CONTROLLED INITIATION CAMPS AND CIRCUMCISION CEREMONIES. A SHAMAN WOULD RITUALLY ADD MAGICAL SUBSTANCES 'BASHIMBA' TO ACTIVATE THE FIGURE AS A SOURCE OF POWER THAT WOULD GIVE PROTECTION AND ENSURE WELL-BEING. LARGER FIGURES ENSURED THE TRANQUILLITY OF THE WHOLE COMMUNITY AND PROMOTED VILLAGE FECUNDITY AND FERTILITY. SMALLER PERSONAL OR FAMILY 'NKISHI' WERE USED FOR PROTECTION AGAINST ILLNESS, SORCERY, WITCHCRAFT, AND WAR AND TO PROMOTE FERTILITY. DUE TO THEIR CONSIDERABLE POWERS, THE FIGURES WERE CONSIDERED DANGEROUS AND SO THEY WERE MANOEUVRED BY MEANS OF RODS OR STICKS ATTACHED TO THEIR ARMS. THEY WERE SOMETIMES MADE TO WALK AS IF ON PARADE.

THESE SMALL HALF FIGURES WERE NOT ALWAYS USED AS PERSONAL PROTECTIVE DEVICES, BUT WERE PLACED IN GOURD BOWLS AND USED BY DIVINERS TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD. THESE DIVINATORY CALABASH WERE FILLED WITH A NUMBER OF SYMBOLIC OBJECTS SUCH AS CHICKEN CLAWS, TEETH, STONES, SEEDS, ETC., AS WELL AS CARVED WOODEN FIGURES. THE SONGYE'S RITUAL USE OF CALABASH CAN BE COMPARED WITH THE BASKETS USED BY THE TSHOKWE.

#### PROVENANCE

EX ENGLISH PRIVATE COLLECTION

ACQUIRED 1950'S

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EX PRIVATE COLLECTION

CF: 'KILENGI, AFRICAN ART FROM THE BAREISS FAMILY COLLECTION' C.D. ROY, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, EXHIBITION IN 2000, NO'S 111, 114 AND 115