Finch & Co



AN EARLY GROUP OF FOUR AFRICAN FIGURES

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EXHIBITED IN NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 1935,

THE SAME YEAR AS MOMA'S GROUNDBREAKING AFRICAN ART EXHIBITION

TWO BAULE FIGURES, A EWE FIGURE AND A YORUBA FIGURE

WOOD

IVORY COAST / TOGO / GHANA / NIGERIA / BENIN

LATE 19TH CENTURY - EARLY 20TH CENTURY

SIZE: BAULE: 66.5CM HIGH - 26¼ INS HIGH / 72CM HIGH - 28¼ INS (WITH BASE)

BAULE: 31.5CM HIGH - 12½ INS HIGH / 36.5CM HIGH - 14¼ INS HIGH (WITH BASE)

EWE: 18.5CM HIGH - 7¼ INS HIGH / 24.5CM HIGH - 9¾ INS HIGH (WITH BASE)

YORUBA: 18CM HIGH - 7 INS HIGH - 23.5CM HIGH - 9¼ INS HIGH (WITH BASE)

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LITERATURE

PUBLISHED: 'AFRICAN NEGRO ART' STENDAHL GALLERY, NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 1935 WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY MERLE ARMITAGE

CF

MERLE ARMITAGE (1893 (IOWA) - MARCH 15, 1975) WAS AN AMERICAN SET DESIGNER, TOUR MANAGER, THEATRE PRODUCER, OPERA PRODUCER, ART COLLECTOR, AUTHOR, AND BOOK DESIGNER.

PHILADELPHIA MUSUEM OF ART HOLDS CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN EARL STENDAHL TO MERLE ARMITAGE, 1944 - 1947.

NOTE: 1935 WAS AN IMPORTANT YEAR IN NEW YORK FOR AFRICAN ART. THE GROUNDBREAKING 'AFRICAN NEGRO ART', EXHIBITION, WAS ORGANISED BY NEW YORK'S MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA). ONE OF THE FIRST EXHIBITIONS IN THE UNITED STATES TO DISPLAY AFRICAN SCULPTURES AS WORKS OF ART. ONE CAN ONLY PRESUME THE STENDAHL GALLERY WANTED TO COINCIDE THEIR OWN EXHIBITION LATER THAT YEAR, ALSO CALLED; 'AFRICAN NEGRO ART' SHOWCASING PRIVATE COLLECTIONS, TOGETHER WITH A CATALOGUE (PRICED AT 25C'S) BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 20TH TO OCTOBER 10TH, 1935 SPONSORED BY LOUIS DANZ AND MERLE ARMITAGE, WHO AUTHORED AND DESIGNED THE CATALOGUE.

LOUIS DANZ, AUTHOR AND DESIGNER, WORKED CLOSELY WITH MERLE ARMITAGE THROUGHOUT THE 1930'S AND 40'S.

BAULE SCULPTURE IS ONE OF WEST AFRICA'S MOST SIGNIFICANT ART TRADITIONS WHICH INFLUENCED MANY 20TH CENTURY ARTISTS, NOTABLY AMEDEO MODIGLIANI. TO WESTERN EYES, THE ESSENCE OF BAULE STYLE IS A BALANCED ASYMMETRY THAT EXCITES WHILE ALSO SUGGESTING STABILITY AND CALM. THE FACES ARE TILTED GENTLY TO ONE SIDE WHILST ONE EYE IS LOWER THAN THE OTHER, THE HAIR IS FINELY CARVED IN ZIG ZAG RIDGES, AND THE DOWNCAST EYES TOGETHER WITH THE CAREFUL HOLDING OF THEIR HANDS AGAINST THEIR BODIES ALL GIVE A FEELING OF PEACEFUL INTROSPECTION.

BAULE FIGURES ARE CARVED TO REPRESENT TWO TYPES OF SPIRIT: SPIRIT SPOUSES OR MATES IN THE OTHER WORLD OR BUSH SPIRITS WHO INHABIT NATURE BEYOND THE EDGE OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS. BOTH ARE SIMILAR IN

FORM AND EACH TYPE IS REFERRED TO BY THE BAULE AS 'WAKA SAN', A PERSON IN THE WOOD. FIGURAL BUSH SPIRITS ARE CARVED AS INTERMEDIARIES WHO MAY INTERVENE IN A PERSON'S LIFE TO CONFER CLAIRVOYANCE, 'ENABLING THEM TO DIVINE THROUGH TRANCE DANCES'. THEY ARE ALSO USED TO LOCALISE TROUBLESOME SPIRITS AND IN THIS INSTANCE THE FIGURES RECEIVE LIBATIONS AND DEVELOP AN ENCRUSTED SURFACE AS HAVE THESE EXAMPLES. SOMETIMES THESE FIGURES BECOME IMPORTANT SPIRIT HELPERS AND ARE DISPLAYED NEAR THE DIVINER DURING A PUBLIC PERFORMANCE.

IN WEST AFRICA THE YORUBA PEOPLE HAVE A RATE OF TWIN BIRTHS FOUR TIMES THAT OF ANYWHERE ELSE, AND TWINS POSED A DIFFICULT PROBLEM FOR THE YORUBA. THEY VIOLATED THE NORMAL PATTERN OF THINGS AS WOMEN NORMALLY ONLY GIVE BIRTH TO ONE CHILD AT A TIME AND TWINS WERE SUBJECT TO A HIGHER RATE OF INFANT MORTALITY. TWINS WERE EXPENSIVE AS THERE WERE TWO MOUTHS TO FEED WITH SPECIAL LUXURIOUS FOOD, AND THIS WAS GIVEN TO THEM WHETHER ALIVE OR DEAD. TWINS ALSO HAD THE CAPACITY TO DELIVER UNEXPECTED GOOD OR BAD FORTUNE TO THEIR PARENTS. THE MOTHERS OF TWINS WOULD NOT DENY THEM ANYTHING IN FEAR OF THIS ILL FORTUNE, AND COULD OFTEN BE SEEN IN THE LOCAL MARKET PLACE SINGING AND DANCING AND BEGGING FOR MONEY IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO PLACATE THEIR OFFSPRING.

THE EWE ARE THE LARGEST ETHNIC GROUP IN TOGO, WITH SMALLER GROUPS IN GHANA, BENIN, IVORY COAST AND NIGERIA. THEY CONSIDER THE BIRTH OF TWINS (CALLED 'VENAVI' OR 'VENOVI') AS A BLESSED OMEN. BOTH TWINS ARE TREATED FAIRLY AND EQUALLY, FED AT THE SAME TIME AND WEARING THE SAME CLOTHES UNTIL THEY REACH PUBERTY. IN THE INSTANCE OF MORTALITY OF ONE TWIN, THE PARENTS WOULD ACQUIRE A STATUETTE TO REPLACE THE DECEASED CHILD. OFTEN A 'DOCTOR' (FETISHIST) WOULD BE CONSULTED TO ACTIVATE THE FIGURE'S 'MAGICAL' VIRTUES.PUBLISHED: 'AFRICAN NEGRO ART' STENDAHL GALLERY, NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 1935 WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY MERLE ARMITAGE

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PROVENANCE

EX BORIS LOVET-LORSKI (1894 - 1973) ARTIST / MODERNIST SCULPTOR

DAWSON'S AUCTIONEERS, NEW JERSEY USA, MAY 2001

EX PRIVATE COLLECTION

EX PRIVATE ENGLISH COLLECTION