

# SMA (Society of African Missions)

The SMA (from the Latin name Societas Missionum ad Afros) was founded in 1856 in Lyon, France by Bishop Melchior de Marion Bresillac, who along with his four companions, died of yellow fever five weeks after their arrival in Sierra Leone in 1859.

The SMA (Society of African Missions), is now an international Roman Catholic missionary organization with 1,100 priests, brothers and women missionaries from ten countries around the world. These missionaries staff churches, seminaries, hospitals, clinics and schools in the most desolate and oppressed corners of Africa. Countries in which they serve include Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Benin, Nigeria, Niger, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, Angola, Zambia, South Africa, Morocco and Egypt.



Photo-Peter Cade

The *dyommo* (rabbit) mask on the cover is one of twenty Dogon masks in the exhibition *Fifty Years of Collecting: The Guinea Coast and the Sudan*, on view at the SMA African Art Museum through May 30, 2011. The Dogon people have created more than eighty mask types to represent characters in their cosmic myths. They are worn in large numbers in funeral dances. The Dogon use such dances to lead homeless souls of the deceased to their final resting places in the world of spirit, where they become part of the ancestor realm. Certain masks act out stories in addition to dancing. An example of this is the *dyommo* mask (rabbit) which performs with the *dannan* mask (hunter). The hunter pretends to hunt the several rabbit masks performing with him. He chases them. They flee in all directions, hiding among the spectators assembled in the village square.

Imprints: Dogon Cliff Dwellers, L. Kahan Gallery Inc., 1978

The SMA African Art Museum  
23 Bliss Avenue, Tenafly, NJ 07670



Photo-Pat Kikaric

# School Programs 2010 – 2011



RABBIT MASK DYOMMO, DOGON, MALI Gift of Leonard and Judy Kahan, 1996  
Wood, commercial enamels, iron nails.

Photo- Peter H Code



## Masks and Figure Sculptures



Photo-Peter Cade

SHRINE FIGURE *ESU*, AREOGUN, YORUBA, NIGERIA, 1952

Collection SMA African Art Museum, Gift of Fr. Sean O'Mahoney, 1999

Close examination of an African work of art from the point of view of art history and criticism can lead us in many interesting directions: philosophy and religion, social studies, economics, literature. This is a wooden shrine figure of *Esu*, the trickster god of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. He is one of a pantheon of gods and goddesses (*orisa*) which includes *Ifa*, god of divinations and healing, *Ogun*, god of iron and war and *Sango*, god of thunder and lightning. These and other Yoruba deities were brought to the New World by African immigrants, beginning with the slave trade.

*Esu* waits for the unwary at the crossroads of life - puberty, a new career, marriage, building a new house or moving from one place to another. If you err, you must make a sacrifice to the gods, who live on such offerings. *Esu* is not God, he is a pathway to God. Africans never represent God, who is all pervasive, male and female, and unknowable. The bird on *Esu's* head is the messenger to heaven. The double gourds are a reference to *Ifa* and herbal medicine, an ancient and still current practice in Africa. The wide open eyes are a reference to cultic trance and communication with the world of spirit. The elaborately accoutered horse is a symbol of prestige. The club with an axe protruding from the human head is a reference to *Ogun*.

## Textiles, Pottery, and Metalwork



Photo-Peter Cade

KENTE CLOTH *ADANUDO*, EWE, GHANA

Collection SMA African Art Museum, Purchase from Eric D. Robertson African Arts, 2002.

The Asanti of Ghana are famous for their colorful and elaborate kente cloth. Their neighbors, the Ewe, produce even more intricate cloths. *Kente* cloth is woven in strips a few inches wide. The strips are then sewn together to make a wrapper for a man or a woman. *Kente* cloths are very expensive and are worn by their owners only on special occasions as symbols of rank and prestige. This *adanudo* is over one hundred years old. It's original owner, probably a chief, did not purchase it in the marketplace; he commissioned it from a master weaver. The designs in the center of the panels are inserted in the body of the weaving by hand, using supplementary weft threads. There are over two hundred such designs on this breathtaking old wrapper. It is one of the treasures in the Tenafly collections.



Photo-Peter Cade

## To Make an Appointment

The SMA African Art Museum (African Art Museum of the SMA Fathers) [www.smafathers.org](http://www.smafathers.org) is located at 23 Bliss Avenue, Tenafly, New Jersey 07670 (201) 894-8611, Email [museum@smafathers.org](mailto:museum@smafathers.org). It is open seven days a week, from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M., and is easily accessible from the Garden State Parkway, Route 80 and Route 4. The museum is located at the intersection of Engle Street and Bliss Avenue, one block north of East Hudson Avenue.



Bob Koenig and Kensho Takemoto (4). Lindgren School, Closter  
Photo-Katie Mauksch

A visit to the SMA African Art Museum includes a tour of the current exhibition as well as a hands-on examination of African masks, figure sculptures, costumes, jewelry, musical instruments, weapons, currency and a lot more from our permanent collections. The experience can be custom-designed for you and your students. It can take from 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours, depending on age level and may include preparation and follow up.

All school tours are with Robert J. Koenig, Director of the SMA African Art Museum. Mr. Koenig has taught for over forty years in public schools, universities, and museums. He has lectured widely on African art. The museum welcomes groups of all ages: pre-school, elementary, secondary, university, undergraduate and graduate, adult education and senior citizen. Children and adults with physical, emotional and intellectual disabilities are welcome.

Call Bob at (201) 894-8611 to make an appointment. The museum does not charge a fee; contributions are welcome.