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Exhibition « Chokwe and their Bantu Neighbours »

Zurich, August 2003. Chokwe objects figure among the most impressive and also most pricey objects of African art. They are fascinating, expressive and of a sensuous beauty.

African Art at its Best

The exhibition "Chokwe and their Bantu Neighbours" at Galerie Walu in Zurich from 5 September to 1 November 2003 brings together over one hundred exclusive objects from public and private collections – an absolute treat for Africa specialists and lovers of Africa.

The statue of a tribal chief, Kaponya wa mwanangana from the Josef Müller collection, is internationally renowned among re-searchers and collectors alike. In 1979, it was on the cover of Christie's "Tribal Art" auction catalogue and already back then commanded a record selling price. The impressive object (page 22 in the exhibition catalogue) is insured for 300,000 euro. The Mwana pwo, a series of young women's masks, are also deemed masterpieces of African art. Besides such publicly known works, Galerie Walu's exhibition will present a number of less prominent pieces, some of which will be on display for the first time. What they all have in common is an extra-ordinary beauty that will entice their viewers, yet their attraction goes beyond the aesthetic. They open up a window to the multiple facets of the tribe's social life. Studying the artistic expressions of the Chokwe will turn into an eye-opening confrontation with the cultural values and way of life of a fascinating African tribe. Even though the Chokwe were often a minority people in their native lands – covering parts of Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia – the cultural influence they exerted in their area of residence is readily visible.

The art of the Chokwe – mirroring their many-layered ways of life and world of ideas

The objects shown introduce visitors to a variety of aspects from the Chokwe's world of ideas as well as their environment and ways of life. Their hierarchy of professions, for instance, is revealed: hunters, blacksmiths and the mask-bearers carry the highest prestige.

Why this is so becomes clear when one learns about the Chokwe's daily life and their set of values. The exhibits also reflect the faith of the Chokwe in supernatural powers and their related traditions. It also reflects the intense intertwining of the not-yet-born, the living and the deceased. Further determining themes in the artwork are fertility, birth and death. Visitors wanting to explore the intangible behind the beautiful forms will enter an alien yet fascinating world.

Galerie Walu | www.walu.ch