

AFRICAN & OCEANIC ART



Fang Reliquary Figure by 'Master of the Upper Ntem Valley' (estimate €400,000–600,000 / \$494,000-742,000)

Superb Fang Reliquary Figure by 'Master of the Upper Ntem Valley'
Oliver & Pamela Cobb Collection (estimate €400,000–600,000 / \$494,000-742,000)

Most Important Known Bwa Butterfly Mask
Thomas G.B. Wheelock Collection (estimate: €150,000-200,000 / \$185,000-247,000)

Remarkable & Previously Unknown Bete/Guro Mask
Jean-Baptiste Filloux Collection (estimate: €250,000-400,000 / \$309,000-494,000)

Paris, May 2012 – Sotheby's will be offering a highly selective sale of African and Oceanic Art for auction in Paris on June 12. The 137-lot sale showcases several remarkably coherent ensembles: two private collections from the U.S. – those of Oliver & Pamela Cobb and Thomas G. B. Wheelock (art of Burkina Faso); an ensemble of African masks with powerful aesthetic appeal; works from Congo and New Ireland; and a number of pieces fresh to the market.

Oliver & Pamela Cobb Collection

Oliver Cobb was initiated to art as a boy by his grandfather Albert Gallatin, a renowned collector of Egyptian art. Each piece in the collection reflects the 'classical' taste and sensitivity Cobb inherited, and all are imbued with the artistic individuality which Oliver Cobb holds dear. The history of these works is linked not just to the prestigious collectors who have owned them on both sides of the Atlantic, but also to their importance within the traditional cultures of their prodigiously creative sculptors.

The star work is an exceptional **Fang reliquary figure attributed to a Master Sculptor from the Upper Ntem Valley**: a magnificent specimen of ancestor statuary with rounded volumes, produced by the Fang Betsi people of northern Gabon. This is one of the very few works of Fang statuary identified as by the hand of this master and, like the figures in the Barnes Foundation (Philadelphia) and Georges de Miré Collection, superbly combines power with sensitivity. The figure is thought to have left Paris in the 1930s to enter the Los Angeles collection of American actor Edward G. Robinson (est. €400,000-600,000 / \$494,000-742,000).*

The collection's majestic **Mbulu Ngulu figure** is one of the rare ancestor effigies which, thanks to its remarkable artistic individuality, can be assigned to a specific Kota workshop in **Equatorial Africa**, based in the village of **Zokolunga** in the 19th century. This superb testament to the astonishing imagination of Kota sculptors is also of note for its great age (est. €150,000-250,000 / \$185,000-309,000).

Nimba sculpture of the Baga people is among the rarest and most emblematic forms of African art. The singularity of its visual language influenced the work of modern artists, notably Picasso, from the start of the 20th century. Within the limited corpus of this ancient statuary, the work to be offered by **Sotheby's** stands out for the energy emanating from its outlines – an arresting evocation of the vocabulary of Cubism and, for modern artists in general, of aesthetic research into movement (est. €60,000-90,000 / \$74,000-104,000).

An **Inhambe female figure**, formerly in the **Jacques Kerchache Collection**, stands out as one of the most remarkable examples of **Tiv statuary**. The sculptor has superbly expressed the sensuality that is an integral part of Inhambe statuary, which is dedicated to marriage and fertility (est. €120,000-180,000 / \$148,000-222,000).

A **Kuba anthropomorphic cup**, formerly in the Albert Gallatin Collection, was first reproduced in 1927 and regularly exhibited in the 1930s, and is a **masterpiece of its kind** – woven into the fabric of historic recognition of African Art in the early 20th century. These very rare anthropomorphic cups were reserved for the use of Kuba chiefs and dignitaries; their creation was a true test of skill for royal artists, marking the never-ending competition for prestige among both artists and their patrons (est. €50,000-70,000 / \$62,000-87,000).



A superb, ancient, ancestor effigy figure attributed to the Northern Hemba counts among the most significant in the history of Hemba art. Although the identity of the chiefs they commemorated is now lost, these effigies served to keep alive the memory of those they honoured, while protecting the chief and members of the clan (est. €250,000-350,000 / \$309,000-433,000).



Thomas G. B. Wheelock Collection & Art of Burkina Faso

This section includes fifteen works from an extensive collection of art from Burkina Faso, remarkable for their age and quality. The highlight is the finest known Bwa butterfly mask – a strikingly modern-looking piece which was exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1996, and whose beauty, age and rarity makes it one of the major pieces in the Wheelock Collection (est. €150,000-250,000 / \$185,000-309,000).

Fascinating Ensemble of Power Masks from Across Africa

An Igala masquerade headpiece formerly in the Ben Heller Collection hails from the region to the south-east of the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers. This major piece was probably used during ceremonies commemorating either a famous warrior or the decapitated captive of a local hero. The rich patina suggests it may be as much as 100-150 years old (est. €250,000-300,000 / \$309,000-371,000). A Guere mask from Ivory Coast is one of the most masterfully expressionistic examples of the warrior masks whose production died out in the early 20th century, in the wake of regional pacification (est. €120,000-180,000 / \$148,000-222,000). A very old Kuba-Kete mask (Democratic Republic of Congo), formerly owned by the French sculptor Arman (who considered it 'exceptional, a mini-masterpiece'), expresses all the force associated with forest spirits (est. €50,000-80,000 / \$62,000-99,000).



Art from Congo

Eight 'fetish' figures from the Abla Volta & Alain Lecomte Collection, reflecting their lifelong passion for the art, magic and medicine of sub-Saharan Africa, are joined in the catalogue by a powerful Kongo figure once owned by Arman, who described it as 'very complete' with 'charges on its feet and shoulders' (est. €100,000-150,000 / \$124,000-185,000); and by items collected by Charles Smets in the Mangbetu kingdoms between 1909-15, as part of the Congo Expedition of the American Museum of Natural History.



Unknown Masterpieces

An exceptional **Bete/Guro mask** belongs to one of the most iconic and restricted bodies of work in the history of African Art (est. €250,000-400,000 / \$309,000-494,000). It was collected by **Jean-Baptiste Filloux** between 1911-13, and is only the third known work by a master sculptor famous for a mask now in the **Art Institute of Chicago**, and another once in the **Tristan Tzara Collection** – acquired by the French State in 1988 and now in the Musée du Quai Branly. Filloux also collected a **very rare Bete/Guro figure with eyes inlaid with mirror** (est. €60,000-90,000 / \$74,000-111,000), and an **anthropomorphic ladle** unique in Bete art (est. €12,000-18,000 / \$15,000-22,000).

After the record €1.3m taken for a 16th century ivory salt by a **Sapi-Portuguese** artist in 2008, Sotheby's will be offering a Sapi-Portuguese ivory cup, discovered in the home of an old family in south-west France, and which adds to our knowledge of the corpus of precious ivories carved for Portuguese navigators in what is now Sierra Leone during the late 15th and 16th centuries – and intended for the great collections of European sovereigns and noblemen (est. €150,000-250,000 / \$185,000-309,000).

Oceanic Art

Sotheby's is delighted to unveil 17 works of **Melanesian & Polynesian Art from the Collection of Christopher & Anna Thorpe in Sydney**, carefully selected for their rarity, age and beauty. They include an **ancient Kanak hermaphrodite figure** – only one other similar figure, now in the Musée du Quai Branly, is known to exist (est. €80,000-120,000 / \$99,000-148,000); a **very old Lower Sepik male figure**, of note for its rare iconography and the quality of its carving (est. €70,000-100,000 / \$87,000-124,000); and a **Kiwi hunting charm**. Used to encourage successful hunting of *dugong* by moonlight, the charm possessed powers of intercession between the hunter-fisherman and the large marine mammal (est. €25,000-40,000 / \$31,000-49,000).

The sale also features a **refined ensemble of five works from New Ireland**, whose sculpture has long fascinated Europeans. The best known comes from the northern part of the island group, and reflect their variety of different ritual and artistic traditions. Superb examples here include a **Uli ancestor figure**, whose blend of male and female attributes represents the ideal qualities of a clan leader (est. €180,000-250,000 / \$222,000-309,000); and a **Malangan Lintel** in the form of an imposing horizontal sculpture known as a kobokobor (est. €70,000-100,000 / \$87,000-124,000).



VIEWING

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| Friday 8 June | 10am-6pm |
| Saturday 9 June | 10am-6pm |
| Sunday 10 June | 2pm-6pm |
| Monday 11 June | 10am-6pm |

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