

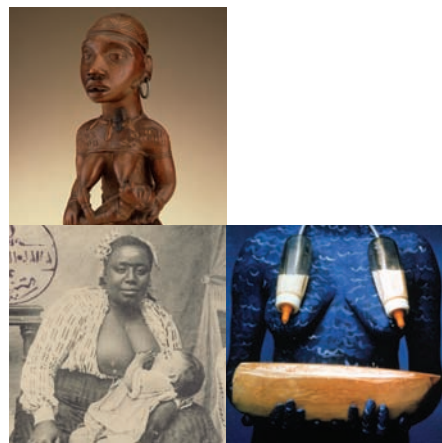
Maternity and Motherhood

Images of maternity and motherhood are universally resonant, yet they too can reveal how notions of black womanhood are constructed differently across cultures and time. Western colonial-era photographs, such as this staged postcard of an African wet nurse and white child, present the African maternal figure as a symbol of the indentured—and previously enslaved—labor force, the equivalent of the American “Mammy” of antebellum literature. The contemporary Cuban artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, who grew up on the same plantation as her enslaved ancestors, usurps the role of the African mother as slave and wet nurse in her self-portrait *When I Am Not Here/Estoy Allá*. In this photograph, she strings twin milk bottles with plastic tubing around her neck so that they hang over her breasts and above a boat-shaped wooden bowl reminiscent of a slave ship. However, the image also evokes well-known African traditional sculptures—such as the Kongo mother and child—that honor the importance of mothers in nurturing and sustaining the family line.



Identities and Social Roles

Common to both traditional African and colonial-era depictions of black womanhood is the image of a woman carrying a pot on her head. While in many African cultures this image most often refers to a woman’s economic roles and contributions toward productivity, it also serves as a metaphor of a woman’s ability to bear great social responsibility with grace, wisdom, and integrity. Read as authentically “African” in colonial-era postcards, this image ironically says less in the West about an African woman’s social identity than about her cultural distance and difference. Contemporary artist Alison Saar extends the visual metaphors embedded in historic images of black women carrying heavy loads on their heads in *Caché*, which means “hidden” or “hiding place.” Saar’s placement of a colossal ball of straightened hair that pins her figure to the floor refers to her own responsibility toward family as well as the burden of her culturally mixed heritage, which is as malleable and impressionable as the metal sheath wrapped around the figure’s body.



CAPTIONS

(cover and above) Maud Sulter, Scottish (1960–2008), *Terpsichore*, 1989, dye destructions print. Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London. Photograph courtesy of Maud Sulter and the Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.

(p. 2) Unknown artist, Punu peoples, Gabon, female mask (*mukudj*), 19th–20th centuries, wood, kaolin. Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the Mrs. Harvey P. Hood W’18 Fund. Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel.

(p. 3) J. Vitta, Tarquah, West Africa (Tarkwa, Ghana), active about 1900, *Gold Coast girl*, about 1910, colotype, postcard. Courtesy of Christraud Geary.

(p. 3) Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Cuban (b. 1959), *When I Am Not Here/Estoy Allá*, 1996, Polaroid photograph. Artist’s collection. Courtesy of Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons and Howard Yezerski Gallery, Boston.

Ideals of Beauty

Unknown artist, Niangara-Mangbetu peoples, Democratic Republic of Congo, female figure, pre-1915, wood, pigment, plant fiber, cord. American Museum of Natural History; 90.1/4294. Photograph courtesy of American Museum of Natural History.

Léon Poirier, French (1884–1968), and Georges Specht, French (active 1909–1931), *Wife of Mangbetu Chief (Belgian Congo)*, halftone print, postcard. Courtesy of Christraud Geary.

Magdalene Odundo, Kenyan (b. 1950), *Untitled*, 2003, blackened terracotta. Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the William B. Jaffe and Evelyn A. Jaffe Hall Fund and the Claire and Richard P. Morse 1953 Fund. Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel.

Fertility and Sexuality

Unknown artist, Ga’anda peoples, Nigeria, ritual beer pot (*lekleke*), 19th–20th centuries, terracotta. Collection of Bill and Gale Simmons, New York. Photo by Bruce White.

Photographer unknown, *A Congo woman*, early 20th century, black and white photograph reproduced from newspaper. American Museum of Natural History; 276935. Photograph courtesy of American Museum of Natural History.

Hassan Musa, Sudanese (b. 1951), *Allegorie a la Banane*, 2001, acrylic on hardboard. Artist’s collection. Photograph courtesy of Hassan Musa.

Maternity and Motherhood

Artist unknown, Kongo peoples, Mayombe region, Democratic Republic of the Congo, female figure with child, late 19th–early 20th centuries, wood, metal, brass tacks, resin, pigment. National Museum of African Art: Museum purchase; 86-12-12. Photograph by Franko Khoury.

G. Mizrahi, Adana (Turkey) (active about 1900), *Type of Negro woman of Adana*, about 1900, published by Baudiniere, Paris, about 1905, colotype, postcard. Courtesy of Christraud Geary.

Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Cuban (b. 1959), *When I am Not Here/Estoy Allá*, 1994, Polaroid photograph. Artist’s collection. Courtesy of Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons and Howard Yezerski Gallery, Boston.

Identities and Social Roles

Unknown artist, Fon peoples, Benin female with pot, 20th century, brass. American Museum of Natural History; 90.2/3564. Photograph courtesy of American Museum of Natural History.

Alex A. Accolatsé, Togolese (1894–1950), *LOMÉ—Togo Native Bear [sic] Sellers*, about 1920, published by A. Accolatsé, Togo, about 1928, colotype, postcard. Courtesy of Christraud Geary.

Alison Saar, American (born 1956), *Caché*, 2006, wood, ceiling tin, wire. Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the Virginia and Preston T. Kelsey 1958 Fund. Photograph courtesy of Alison Saar and LA Louver Gallery, Venice, California.

HOOD MUSEUM OF ART

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This exhibition was organized by the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, and is generously funded by a grant from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Art; Hugh J. Freund ’67, P’08; the William B. Jaffe and Evelyn A. Hall Fund; the Leon C. 1927, Charles L. 1955, and Andrew J. 1984 Greenebaum Fund; the Hanson Family Fund; and the William Chase Grant 1919 Memorial Fund.



This guide is designed to introduce you to the exhibition, familiarize you with its three different sections, and illustrate ways that common themes connect the works of art on display. Looking questions are provided to help you further explore these many connections on your own.

BLACK WOMANHOOD

IMAGES, ICONS, AND IDEOLOGIES OF THE AFRICAN BODY

April 1–August 10, 2008
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College