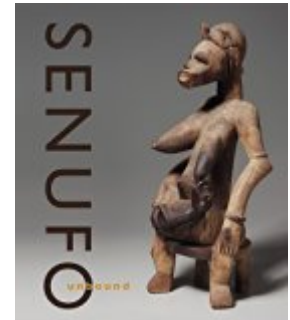


Susan Elizabeth Gagliardi. *Senufo Unbound.* Cleveland: 5 Continents Editions, 2015. 272 pp. \$75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-88-7439-666-5.



Reviewed by Fred Smith

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Senufo Unbound: Dynamics of Art and Identity In West Africa is a thought-provoking book produced by the Cleveland Museum of Art to accompany an exhibition scheduled for three venues, two American and one French. Although all works in the exhibition are illustrated, this publication is not a catalogue. None of the illustrated works are specifically discussed or connected to the text. But as stated in the first sentence of the director's foreword, "*Senufo Unbound: Dynamics of Art and Identity In West Africa* is the companion publication to a travelling loan exhibition" (p. 7). As the exhibition curator, Constantine Petridis, states in the preface, "the publication and complementary exhibition ... serve as the starting points for continued research and reflection" (p. 11). In addition to the director's foreword and the preface, the book contains eighteen sections consisting of twelve essays (four of these are single-page, focused statements labeled "interleaves") and six divisions for plates. The preface provides an overview of both the publication and the exhibition, with greater attention paid to the organization of

the exhibition and to how it relates to the themes established in the book. All of the works on view, which include many that were exhibited in the 1963 Museum of Primitive Art exhibition, were selected by Petridis and are illustrated with excellent photographs.

In her introduction, Susan Gagliardi clearly defines the book by stating that it will explore both the historical foundations for the term "Senufo" and how it has been subsequently used. After briefly discussing the 1963 Goldwater exhibition, Gagliardi declares that the idea of a distinctive and identifiable Senufo style "rests on the late nineteenth-century notion that Senufo refers to a distinct culture or ethnic group within a bounded geographic area" (p. 42). Challenging this assertion is her focus. She begins the discussion by examining the early twentieth-century writings of dealers, art collectors, and scholars, observing that they linked art styles to discrete cultural or ethnic groups while ignoring the dynamic nature of ethnic identity. However, she does acknowledge that by the mid-twentieth century, a number

of scholars such as Frans Olbrechts, Roy Sieber, Arnold Rubin, Sidney Kasfir, and others had begun to question this approach. Gagliardi ends the introduction by suggesting that to better understand the arts of Africa it is necessary to recognize each object's singularity and to transcend boundaries when considering art patrons, consumers, and producers.

The first short essay (interleaf), entitled "Mapping Senufo," contains an excellent map of the three-corner region of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire, which is the geographic focus of both the exhibition and publication. The communities identified on the map are principally within the Senufo-speaking area. The next full essay, "Senufo-ness and its Nineteenth-Century Foundations," centers on the contributions of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century observers as well as the establishment of a Senufo identity. Gagliardi stresses that scholars from the earliest references recognized the overlapping of Senufo and Mande peoples. Yet by the twentieth century, the art world in particular began to view Senufo as a distinct and definable category. A number of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century researchers, especially Maurice Delafosse, are discussed in terms of their field observations and how they have contributed to establishing a definition of Senufo or "Senufo-ness." Gagliardi notes that in his writings, Delafosse references distinct characteristics of Senufo culture among those who share language but acknowledges that they do not "necessarily recognize a shared identity" (p. 74).

The second interleaf ("Albert Maesen and Early Art-Historical Study in Northern Cote D'Ivoire") examines the importance of Maesen's fieldwork during the late 1930s, especially as it relates to issues of style and style areas. It also mentions briefly the related 1940 exhibition organized by Maesen's mentor, Frans S. Olbrechts. The essay following, entitled "An Iconoclastic Movement, a Catholic Church, and an Exodus of Sculpture," be-

gins with a brief discussion of how the publicity for the 1963 Senufo exhibition, curated by Robert Goldwater for the Museum of Primitive Art in New York, stressed the unity and antiquity of Senufo culture and art. Numerous art works were available for the exhibition because European dealers, especially Emil Storrer, were making art-collecting trips to Cote d'Ivoire. These trip were very successful because during this period, the Massa movement, which originated in 1946 in Cote d'Ivoire, was encouraging communities to abandon art objects. Another iconoclastic movement occurred during the 1960s. Two field photographs of sculptures from the late 1940s/early 1950s are illustrated and briefly discussed. The written and photographic work of other researchers during this period, including Bohumil Holas, Hans Himmelheber, and others is presented in great detail. The organizing of the Museum of Primitive Art exhibition concludes this chapter with a reference to Goldwater's promotion of the idea of "Senufo-ness."

The third essay, entitled "Poro Revisited," examines how a number of objects, especially masks, relate to Poro and other power associations found among most but not every community identified as Senufo. Importantly, Gagliardi stresses that there are differences in Poro from one community to another. She states, "Poro ... designates a range of associations or organizations in different places rather than a single pan-Senufo institution that is the same everywhere" (p. 188). The variety of structures and roles of Poro as well as the differing types of sculptures employed are examined. Finally, the reported existence of the Komo association (normally identified as Bamanan) in some Senufo communities is cited as yet another example of shared cultural features. The analysis of Poro in this chapter provides an important framework for the reader to understand the context of what can be called Senufo art.

The next interleaf briefly deals with the variations in the practice of divination. During the

twentieth century various scholars documented different types of objects used for this purpose. However, according to Gagliardi, only a few diviners utilize figurative sculpture today. The next chapter, "Seeing Beyond Bounds: Arts of the Power Associations," explores in great detail the arts of both Bamana and Senufo power associations, focusing on their leadership, organization, and activities. There is an extensive discussion of the Bamana Komo, and to a lesser extent, Kono associations. Although this information is not clearly connected to the Senufo, it comprises one of the most informative and well-written chapters in the publication. In fact, it is within this chapter that the text connects directly with objects and therefore resonates particularly with the nonacademic reader.

The final interleaf, "Views From Fourou through the Travels of Leo Frobenius," basically examines the ethnic information associated with drawings of four art objects made during the 1907-09 expedition to the town of Fourou in present-day Mali. The chapter that follows is the conclusion, in which Gagliardi recalls that the work of earlier scholars, especially Anita Glaze on the Senufo and Patrick McNaughton on the Bamana, did recognize the existence of cross-cultural artistic interactions. She then asserts that the book demonstrates that "diverse individuals and organizations involved in the production and reception of arts in the three-corner region have transcended cultural, ethnic, geopolitical, linguistic and religious borders since at least the end of the nineteenth century" (p. 271).

The book concludes with an afterword by Tiona Ferdinand Ouattara, director of the Institute of African History, Art and Archaeology at the Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Cote d'Ivoire, who states that the name "Senufo" originated with the French colonial administrators in the late nineteenth century and that the people so identified do not use the term to denote them-

selves. Moreover, he notes that the method of object acquisition has created additional problems.

The primary message of the publication is that scholars need to recognize the complexity and multiplicity of identity. However, this message is not new. Recognizing the problem of associating art works with particular ethnic groups has a long history. In this regard, the author does mention the pioneering work of Roy Sieber and Arnold Rubin in 1968 as well as the work by Anita Glaze in the 1980s and 1990s. But scholars working in other areas of Africa have also expressed concern with the notion of rigid ethnic styles. In my own work on architectural embellishment and craft production in northeastern Ghana, I have strongly stated that ethnicity and artistic styles do not connect. Although not discussed in the text, the high-quality photographs of the works in the exhibition enhance the publication. *Senufo Unbound: Dynamics of Art and Identity In West Africa* is an excellent scholarly publication that accompanies an outstanding exhibit

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