

Black History Month at MAA

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For Black History Month, we are celebrating artisans across Africa to the Caribbean to the UK.

Artisans are highly skilled carvers and artists who create objects that are both beautiful but have a use in day-to-day life, rituals, and traditions.

African carvings were created to make a political comment, celebrate a special occasion, or represent spiritual or religious ideas.

The images on this table focus on objects that are linked to beliefs, folklore and stories passed on from generation to generation. Have a look at their stories and have fun colouring in some of the objects from our collections.



1994.172 - Jamaica, Caribbean

I am called Mami Wata, in West Africa or sometimes Mammy Water, in the Caribbean. You will find that my name is spelt and pronounced differently depending on which country of Africa or the Caribbean you go to.

Here are some of the countries that you can find me in:

Nigeria
Ghana
Jamaica
Trinidad and Tobago
Haiti

Some people call me a mermaid because of my tail and long hair. I am the goddess of the water and I bring healing, protection, wealth and fortune.

This object was made by Doc Williams, he called it Rivermaid.





2015.249 - Ghana

I am called Asanbonsam or Sasabonsam by the Akan people in Ghana. In Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, they call me Soucouyant or Soucristant. They say that I am like a vampire because of my tall height, large wings, sharp teeth, and because I am always around at night.

This object was made by Osei Bonsu and is carved out of mahogany.

1920.331 - Nigeria, Africa

Hi, I am one half of an Ibeji in Yoruba or in English, this would mean twins. Twins are very lucky in African and diaspora traditions and are usually very magical. We bring abundance, joy, and mischief and represent the good and bag of the world. You can also find us in Haitian Vodou where we are called Marassa Jumeaux.

If one twin goes away, then the family must get one of these carvings made of the twins and look after it. The family must clean feed and care for it for the rest of their lives otherwise they will have bad luck.

The person that carves these objects are called Babalawo in Yoruba, or Babalao in the Caribbean meaning father of mysteries.





Z20496 - Sierra Leone, West Africa

I am Soweï. I am a powerful mask worn only by women who are elders in the Sande secret society. When danced I, and the woman who dances me, am called *noli joweï*. I represent ideal womanhood. My rounded face and plump neck rolls represent abundance. My broad forehead represents knowledge and wisdom. My facial expressions and pose represents balance and presence.

Mende people are one of the two largest ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, and they are known for their wooden art.

Wood carving is still very important in Sierra Leone and many other places in Africa and across the globe.

This mask is carved out of wood and covered in a black natural dye.







1965.28 A - Ghana, West Africa

I am called Asansi. I am a character from Akan folklore and a very important character in storytelling. Some people spell my name like Ananse or Ananci. Normally, I take the shape of a spider and am known for being the trickster and being wise and a great speaker.

You may also hear about me in the Caribbean, where I am called Aunt Nancy, Nancy, or sis Nancy.

I am also known for being a wise trickster with the great ability to speak. But I am a symbol of slave resistance and survival as I was able to trick the enslavers and find strategies to free myself and other enslaved people.

In this object, you can see my webs on a Calabash. Calabashes are gourds which are made into objects like musical instruments or crockery like spoons.