Common Characteristics of African Art

- Innovation of form
- Visual Abstraction
- Parallel Asymmetry
- Sculptural Primacy
- Performance
- Humanism
- Ensemble and Assemblage
- Multiplicity of meaning

Male Figure, 195 BC - 205 AD, Unknown Nok Artist, Nigeria, Kimbell Art Museum

Seated Dignitary, c. 250 BC, Unknown Nok Artist, Nigeria, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Equestrian Figure, 945 - 1245, Unknown Djenne Artist, Mali, Minneapolis Institute of Art
Chi Ware Kan Masks (Top: Female, Right: Male), 20th century, Unknown Bamana Artists, Mali, Top: Cincinnati Art Museum, Right: National Museum of African Art

Seated Male Figure with Lance, 15th-20th century, Unknown Bamana Artist, Mali, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Bracelet and Necklace, 11th - 16th century, Unknown Jennenke Artists, Mali, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Mask, 19th-20th century, Unknown Senufo Artists, Cote d’Ivoire, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Poro Divination Figures (Left Male, Right Female), 19th-20th century, Unknown Baule Artists, Cote d’Ivoire, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Map of Africa and surrounding areas.
Shrine Head, 12th - 14th century
Unknown Ife Artist, Nigeria,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Crowned Head of an Oni,
12th - 15th century ,
Unknown Ife Artist, Nigeria,
Museum of Ife Antiquities

Scan Treasures of Ancient Nigeria, Eyo & Willett, Wm. Collins & Sons, Ltd.

Facsimile of Map with King of Mali, 1375,
Unknown Spanish Artist, Africa,
Metropolitan Museum of Art/British Library

Sankofa Bird, Figurative Weight,
19th century, Unknown Asante Artist,
Ghana, Scan: Art of Africa by Pamela McCluskey, Seattle Art Museum

Asante Chief, Unknown Date,
Unknown Photographer, Ghana, Africa,
Scan African Textiles, by Picton & Mack, Harper & Row, Inc.

Lingpito Staff (Oykeame),
19th - 20th century,
Unknown Akan Artist, Ghana,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Textile Wrapper, 20th century, Unknown Asante Artist, Ghana, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Textile Blanket, Chieftain, 19th century, Unknown Fulani Artist, Mali or Ghana, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Adinkra Cloth, Unknown Date, Unknown Asante Artists, Nigeria, Scan: African Textiles, by Picton & Mack, Harper & Row, Inc.

Adinkra Cloth, 20th century, Unknown Asante Artists, Nigeria, Scan: Art from Africa, by Pamela McCluskey, Seattle Art Museum

Igbo Resist Dye, Unknown Date, Unknown Igbo Artist, Nigeria, Scan: African Textiles, by Picton & Mack, Harper & Row, Inc.

Yoruba Cloth Market, Unknown Date, Unknown Photographer, Ghana, Scan: African Textiles, by Picton & Mack, Harper & Row, Inc.
Olorun, the High-God and Creator is the source of all beauty. Olorun is not represented in art, but lesser gods are shown in symbolic terms that emphasize their characteristics and beauty.

Inner beauty is true beauty, manifest in a person’s character and morality. Outer beauty is recognized but considered secondary.

Source: *Art Beyond The West*, By Michael K. O’Riley, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 2001

Sculpture should contain a relative likeness, by capturing the subject’s characteristics without being too realistic or too abstract.

Artworks with beauty include:
- Good composition with symmetry
- Balance
- Clarity of form and line
- Luminosity and delicacy
- Ornamentation that enhances beauty.

Source: *Art Beyond The West*, By Michael K. O’Riley, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 2001

Artworks that capture the essential and important part of their subject matter are “cool”

The words for “cool” and “good character” are nearly synonymous in Yoruba.

Cool includes:
- Moderation
- Strength
- Smartness
- Peace

“Coolness” has social as well as artistic applications.

Source: *Art Beyond The West*, By Michael K. O’Riley, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 2001

Lidded Bowl, 17th - 18th century, Unknown Yoruba Artist, Nigeria, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Ceremonial Sword, 17th - 18th century, Unknown Yoruba Artist, Nigeria, Metropolitan Museum of Art
This ends our exploration of the art of Western Africa.