



Kota: Visions of Africa Series

Louis Perrois

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The Kota people, who live in Gabon in the coastal area of western equatorial Africa, have developed an astonishing creativity in representations of their ancestors. Dreamlike figures combine a sharp sense of stylized reality tending toward abstraction with an extraordinary and imaginative use of copper, tin, and iron for purposes of decoration. But what seems at first to have been a matter of aesthetic taste has in fact a symbolic function, as most of the decorative motifs and the choice of the technique are linked to the kinship system or religious beliefs. The reliquary figures and initiation masks of the Kota and Mbete served both as *aide-mémoires* and as instruments useful in arousing the forces of the netherworld among the Gabonese and Congolese in times past. Together with the Fang *byeri* and other *nkisi punu*, they have gradually become the time-honored emblems of a culture paying tribute to ancestral values of the peoples of the African equatorial forest.

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