

Emmett & White

ANTIQUES & INTERIORS

19th century Baule Blolo Bian - Spirit Husband carved wooden seated figure, Ivory Coast.

£1,200



REF: 5081

Height: 52 cm (20.5")

Width: 10 cm (3.9")

Depth: 15 cm (5.9")

Description

Blole Bian - Spirit Husband figure - by the Baule people of the Ivory Coast

Baule Seated fertility figure, Ivory Coast. The style and wear suggest this piece has had significant tribal use and dates to the mid 19th century.

The Baule believe that, in the otherworld called Blole, all human beings were married before birth. These spirit spouses called blole bian, meaning 'spirit husband', and blole bla, meaning 'spirit wife', follow them into their human lives by way of human-figure sculptures called waka sran, or 'person in wood'. Baule people carve these figures to represent their otherworld spouses and they believe that these spirits have influence over their human lives.

Spirit figures are intended to serve a single individual and have private shrines in the home dedicated to them. When a Baule person undergoes some form of distress, be it emotional, physical or spiritual, he or she might consult a komien, or diviner. Divination usually reveals that one's spirit spouse has become jealous or angry and is the cause of such distress. Oftentimes, the proposed solution is to devote a shrine, called tata, in which the figure becomes the centre and its vengeful spirit can be appeased.

The Baule believe spirit figures can bring good fortune to all areas of life. However, it is also believed that any good fortune the owner receives reduces the amount of good fortune that's available to everyone else. With that in mind, owners keep all personal possessions and sculptures out of sight in closed sleeping rooms. Although these figures aren't considered to be sacred objects, they were intended to only be used and openly looked at by the individual owner. If the owner chooses to show these sculptures, surreptitious glancing, called nian klekle, is the only acceptable way for Baule people to view these sculptures when displayed as art.

This is one of part of a collection purchased from the estate of a collector of original tribal artefacts.