



I notice . . .



I wonder . . .



**Prestige Trumpet**  
 Mende, Sierra Leone  
 Early 20th century  
 Elephant ivory  
 5 7/8 x 30 1/4 x 3 3/4 in. (14.9 x 78 x 9 cm)  
 Gift of Peter and Ann Wengraf  
 1994.169.1



Fine Arts  
 Museums of  
 San Francisco  
 de Young  
 Legion of Honor



# Ivory Chief's Trumpet

WEST AFRICA

Age:  
Around 100 years old

Size:  
2½ feet long

Function:  
To announce the arrival  
of high-ranking chiefs



**For hundreds of years** ivory trumpets such as this were used in West Africa to announce the arrival of high-ranking chiefs. The music made by an ivory horn of this size is similar to the trumpeting sound of an elephant. This horn retains the shape of the elephant's tusk. Within Africa, the elephant has long been respected for its power and wisdom. The ivory from its tusks is also admired for its hardness, color, rarity, and shine.

Ivory has played an important role in Africa's history.

It has been made into luxury items for **traditional** African use such as this trumpet. It has been traded to Arab merchants who crossed the Sahara Desert. Over the last 200 years, huge amounts of African ivory were exported by **colonial powers**. As a result, the African elephant is now an endangered species, and the international trade of ivory has been banned.

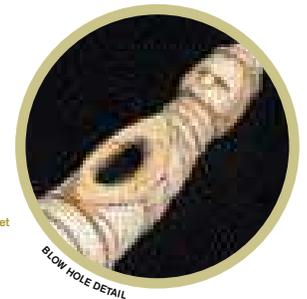
**traditional:** In this discussion, the term "traditional" refers to older African ways of life, beliefs, art styles, and religions that were in place before the arrival or great influence of European and Muslim cultures.

**colonial powers:** During the 1800s, many European countries claimed land in Africa. These European countries or colonial powers were interested in Africa as a source of wealth through the supply of slaves and raw materials. Between 1900 and 1975, African countries won their right to self-government.



COPYRIGHT HERBERT M. COLE

This Igbo man is showing the way an elephant tusk trumpet is blown. (Southern Nigeria, 1982)



BLOW HOLE DETAIL

## Why does it look like this?

The **Mende** carver who made this trumpet playfully carved the hole (used to blow into the trumpet) in the figure's chest, exactly where the lungs would be. The figure wears a western style hat, influenced by European hat styles. During the late 1800s, Great Britain began to trade with the Mende people; at the same time European-style clothing began to appear on traditional Mende art objects such as this.

**Mende:** a group of African people who live in Sierra Leone and Liberia



MP DETAIL



**Plaque: Girl with Leopard**  
 Kingdom of Benin, Edo, Nigeria  
 Ca. 1600  
 Bronze or brass, 17 3/4 x 7 in. (45.1 x 17.8 cm)  
 Museum purchase, William H. Noble Bequest Fund  
 1980.31

  
 Fine Arts  
 Museums of  
 San Francisco  
 de Young  
 Legion of Honor

I notice...



I wonder...

# Plaque from the Kingdom of Benin

WEST AFRICA

Age:  
Over 400 years old

Size:  
Around 1½ feet tall

Function:  
To decorate a royal palace

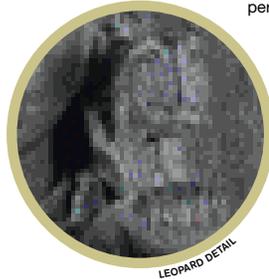


**plaque:** a flat thin piece of metal used for decoration or to remember a certain event or person

**Benin:** a West African kingdom in Nigeria

**Nigeria:** a modern-day country in West Africa

**bronze:** a metal made up of copper and tin that must be melted at extremely high temperatures to be formed into shapes. The shapes are usually first made in wax, and then covered with clay to form a mold. Liquid metal is poured into the mold, which then must be broken to reveal the sculpture. This is called "lost wax" casting.



**In West and Central Africa** there were many great kingdoms built, in part, on the wealth that resulted from long-distance trade. Many beautiful pieces of art were made for these royal courts. This **plaque** was made over 400 years ago to decorate the royal **Benin** palace in present-day **Nigeria**. The plaque is made from **bronze**, a costly and rare metal often used in royal art. The artists of Benin were experts in bronze casting. In fact, this part of Africa had perfected metalworking long before Europeans arrived on the coast in the 1470s and 1480s.

This young female figure was probably a royal servant in the Benin court. On her shoulder is a water jug in the form of a leopard. Actual leopard jugs like this were used in Benin court ceremonies. The leopard is a symbol of the Benin king. For many years the Benin kings actually kept leopards at the royal palace, and they were also given as sacrifices to royal ancestors.

## Why does it look like this?

The detailed marks on the royal servant's body might have been patterns of body paint. The plaque is pierced at the four corners so that it could be attached to a pillar of the royal palace.



This photograph from the 1930s shows Oba Akenzua II, King of Benin, wearing coral and ivory jewelry and symbols of kingship at one of the great ceremonial events in Benin.