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SENUFO SANS FRONTIÈRES

LA DYNAMIQUE DES ARTS ET DES IDENTITÉS EN AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST

Texts by Susan Elizabeth Gagliardi

New York's now defunct Museum of Primitive Art (MPA) opened its landmark exhibition *Senufo Sculpture from West Africa* in February 1963. Under the directorship of modernist art historian Robert Goldwater, the MPA displayed together for the first time ever a stunning array of arts attributed to Senufo artists, patrons, and audiences. Exaggerated yet delicate face masks, composite yet integrated zoomorphic helmet masks, and geometric yet gentle figurative sculptures exemplify the MPA's vision of the Senufo style. In the book accompanying the exhibition, Goldwater described a cultural context for Senufo communities in a region spanning the borders of present-day Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali. More than fifty years later, Gagliardi's *Senufo* draws on archival, museum, and field-based data, including previously unpublished letters, photographs, and objects, to look back at the MPA's tour de force. *Senufo* investigates the making of *Senufiness* since the late nineteenth century, when the French government seized cities and captured political rivals as part of its colonization efforts in the region. The book explores a mid-twentieth-century convergence of Catholic missionaries, an art dealer, and an iconoclastic movement in northern Côte d'Ivoire that led to an exodus of iconic objects from Africa to Europe and North America. And it examines the presence and absence in communities identified as Senufo of poro, a great patron for the arts and an institution at the core of certain constructions of *Senufo* identity. Joining historical analysis with eye-catching sculptures, *Senufo* offers expanded views of a dynamic region's arts and identities.

Susan Elizabeth Gagliardi is assistant professor of art history at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Her current research is based on twenty-two months of fieldwork in Senufo- and Mande-speaking communities of western Burkina Faso.