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## HEMBA

LUIGI SPINA AND CONSTANTINE PETRIDIS

Expressing one of many Luba sub-styles, the tall, standing male figures created by master carvers of the Hemba culture in southeastern Congo since at least the mid-1800s arguably rank among the noblest sculptural depictions of the human figure in sub-Saharan Africa. With their serene gaze and meditative expression, they exude a tranquillity and dignity that befits these idealized likenesses memorializing esteemed leaders of the past.

Infused with a life-force or vital energy, these spirit-invested objects were able to communicate between the living and the dead. Thanks to their inner power they had the capacity to impact the material sphere by allowing the ancestors to positively influence the well-being of their surviving relatives.

In this publication, through the perceptive lens of art photographer Luigi Spina, we discover nine of the most accomplished Hemba creations whose classical style has triggered comparisons with some *kouroi* sculptures of ancient Greece. Spina's photographic interpretations help us understand why these proportionally balanced and symmetrically conceived ancestral figures have earned the admiration of African art lovers around the world.

These personal readings of the beloved Hemba commemorative portraits also confirm why these sensitive renderings of the human anatomy deserve inclusion in the universal history of artistic creativity and a place in André Malraux's "Museum Without Walls."

After a tenure of more than fourteen years at the Cleveland Museum of Art, **Constantine (Costa) Petridis** joined the Art Institute of Chicago on November 1, 2016, as Curator of African art and Chair of the Department of the Arts of Africa and the Americas. A prolific editor and writer specialized in arts of Central Africa, Petridis most recently also contributed various essays to Frank Herreman's *Mumuye Sculpture from Nigeria: The Human Figure Reinvented*, which was published by 5 Continents Editions in 2016.

**Luigi Spina** (b. 1966) is a photographer from Naples. He participated in the ninth International Photography Festival in Rome and at MIAFAIR 2013 with his book-project *The Buchner Boxes*. With 5 Continents Editions he has published: *The Buchner Boxes*, *The Dancers from the Villa dei Papyri*, *Memorie del Vaso Blu*, *Amazzonomachia*, and *Centaurs*. He began his photographic portrayal of the Farnese collection of Classical sculptures for the Archaeological Museum of Naples in 2002.