



David Sanou (headpiece carved in the studio of André Sanou); the maker of the body requests anonymity. *Kimi Masquerade in Honor of André Sanou's "Qui Dit Mieux?"*, 2022. Wood, fibers, glue, synthetic dyes, and paints; dimensions variable. Commissioned for Fitchburg Art Museum in 2022. Image courtesy of the New Orleans Museum of Art. Photo: Sesthasak Boonchai

*New African Masquerades: Artistic Innovations and Collaborations* highlights the stories of four contemporary masquerade artists, their motivations, artistic choices, and the patronage and economic networks with which they engage. Through the presentation of works of Chief Ekpenyong Bassey Nsa (Nigeria), David Sanou (Burkina Faso), Sheku "Goldenfinger" Fofanah (Sierra Leone), and Hervé Youmbi (Cameroon), the exhibition offers fresh research models for contemporary masquerade, bringing to the fore issues relating to ownership and research ethics.

A collaboration between an international team of scholars and artists, this is the first major exhibition on contemporary West African masquerade artists to focus on individual creators rather than the typical presentation of masquerades as products of entire cultures, which undermines the nuanced and layered stories that individual artists and masquerades tell.

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A Kimi mask (headpiece carved by David Sanou in the studio of André Sanou) dancing in Nasso, Burkina Faso (detail), April 22, 2015. Image courtesy of the New Orleans Museum of Art. Photo: Lisa Homann

Many cultures around the world utilize skillful artwork and craftwork to honor wise ancestors. This is certainly true for many of the cultures that participate in African mask making. Many of the themes found within African mask making revolve around funeral rituals and paying homage to the deceased. Today, we are going to talk about a specific kind of African mask making that honors lifelong guides. We will then reflect on our own lives, thinking about who we are guided by. We will make a foil relief plate to honor the person we choose.

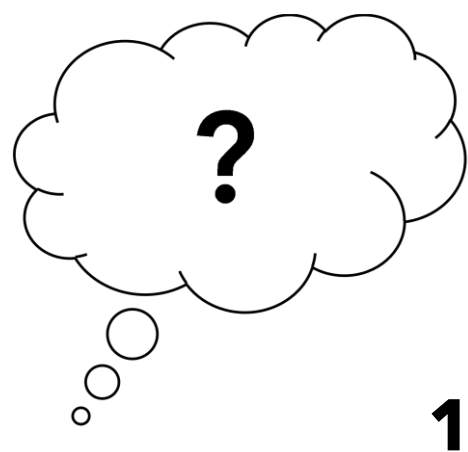
In Burkina Faso, the Kimi style of mask is worn during rituals performed at funeral services to honor loved ones. The mask is carved out of wood and depicts animals, especially birds. This tradition is based on beliefs involving spirits inhabiting the natural world, and the belief that the people we are close with can offer us guidance, even if they are not with us. The Compromise Kimi is a subset of Kimi Masquerade that mixes Kimi features with components of Photo Masquerade. Photo Masquerade involves creating realistic masks that look like their subject's face. For some people who commission African masks, Photo Masquerade is not acceptable. Compromise Kimi is a way of combining the specificity of Photo Masquerade with the fantasy of Kimi Masquerade to create a mask that honors a loved one who has passed on.

For this activity, we will be using a foil relief technique to create Compromise Kimi plates that honor someone who guides us in our lives, similarly to how Compromise Kimi masks honor deceased loved ones. Our goal is to honor a meaningful relationship by utilizing shapes, symbols, color, and emotion. Consider your community and the people who know you best. Who has helped you grow into the person you are? They could be deceased or living. While considering your relationship, begin identifying symbols that represent your thoughts and create a composition incorporating them into our project.

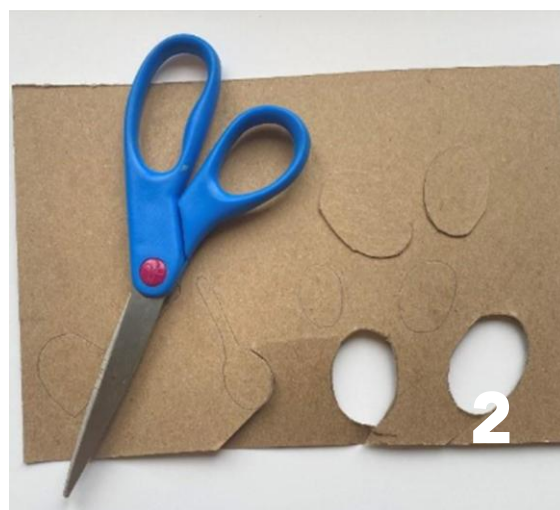
### Questions

- Who provides guidance to you? In what areas of your life do they guide you?
- How do you celebrate your loved ones? How are you celebrated by your loved ones?
- What activities do you do with others?
- Why might it be important to include artwork, such as masks, in funeral traditions?





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## Activity: Compromise Kimi Foil Reliefs

### Objective

Participants will explore symbolism, metaphor, and composition to create a foil relief plate based on the Compromise Kimi masquerade genre. They will practice reflecting on their community and its function in their lives.

### Materials

- Cardboard sheets
- Foil sheets
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Rulers
- Pencils
- Colorful permanent markers

### Steps

1. Consider who offers guidance to you. Choose one person to focus on. They might be a teacher, a friend, a parent, a religious leader, or someone else. Think about what characterizes your relationship with this person. What activities do you do together? Do you bake together? Do they tutor you in a school subject? As you consider these questions, begin identifying objects, shapes, or symbols that visually represent your thoughts. You might consider visuals such as a soccer ball, an arrow, a bird, or a star.
2. You have two pieces of cardboard in front of you. One sheet is for cutting out images, and one sheet is the surface you will glue your shapes to. Using your pencil, begin sketching the shapes for your composition on one piece of cardboard. Once finished, use your scissors to cut out your shapes.
3. Before gluing your shapes to your other sheet of cardboard, try arranging the shapes a few different ways to develop a composition you like. Try layering your cardboard cutouts on top of one another. Once you have chosen a composition, glue the shapes to the cardboard sheet.
4. Next, coat one side of a foil sheet with glue. Lay the sheet, glue side down, on top of your cardboard composition. Fold the edges of the foil around the back of the cardboard and secure them with glue.
5. Define the edges of the shapes underneath the foil by running your fingertip over the foil using light-to-medium pressure. Spend extra time around the borders of your shapes. Be gentle to avoid ripping the foil.
6. Color your design using permanent markers.





Two raffia Efik Ekpe masquerades with Chief Ekpenyong Bassey Nsa during his Ekpe chieftaincy installation, Creek Town, Nigeria, December 31, 2009. Image courtesy of the New Orleans Museum of Art. Photo: Jordan A. Fenton

Chief Ekpenyong Bassey Nsa is a renowned third-generation artist specializing in the creation of masquerade ensembles. He learned his craft from his father, who is credited with modernizing masquerade ensembles for the Ekpe secret society, a powerful social and political organization in Nigeria.

The Ekpe secret society uses a writing system called *Nsibidi*, which uses symbols to refer to abstract concepts, actions, or things.

Chief Ekpenyong Bassey Nsa is seen here wearing an ensemble featuring Ukara cloth with Nsibidi symbols.

### Terms

- Ukara cloth: An indigo-dyed textile, adorned with Nsibidi symbols using a resist method, used by members of the Ekpe secret society in the Cross River area of South East Nigeria, West Africa.
- Nsibidi: An ancient system of writing developed by the Ekpe secret society that uses symbols to refer to abstract concepts, actions, or things.

### Additional Resource

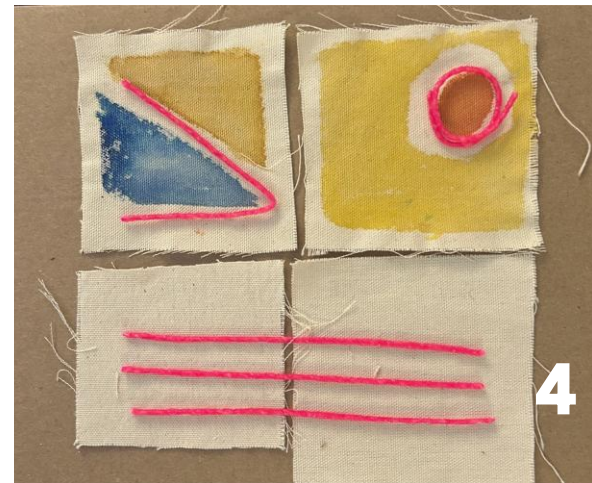
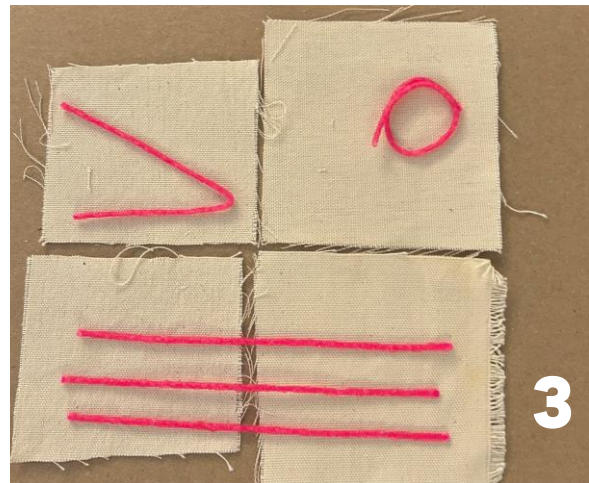
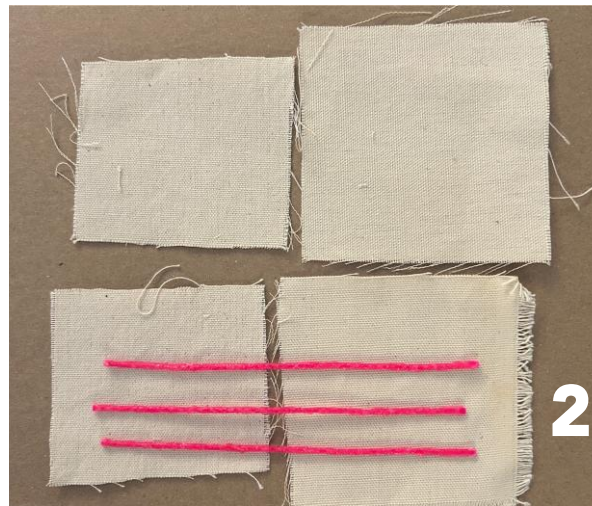
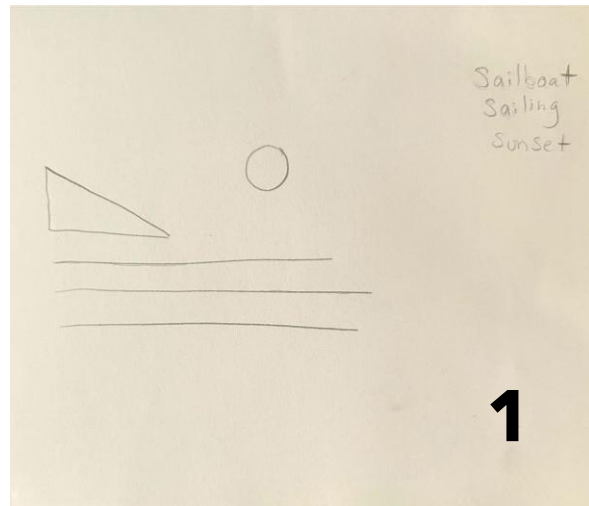
See examples of Nsibidi characters and the ideas they represent here:

<https://www.africanhistoryextra.com/p/the-nsibidi-script-ca-600-1909-ce>.

### Questions

- Look at the photo of Chief Ekpenyong Bassey Nsa. What might some of the symbols on his garment refer to?
- How might you represent abstract concepts from your own life like friendship, family, your favorite music, hobbies or interests, or your environment?





## Activity: Symbolic Resist Dye

### Objective

Participants will consider the meaning of various Nsibidi characters and create their own symbolic fabric pieces using wax resist-dye methods.

### Materials

- Cotton muslin fabric squares
- Wikki Stix or quick-drying fabric glue
- Watercolor paint
- Water cups
- Paint brushes
- Cardboard sheet
- Sketch paper

### Steps

1. On paper, write down a few concepts you'd like to symbolize and come up with a simple, unique line drawing representing each.
2. Lay out two to five pieces of cotton muslin on your cardboard sheet.
3. Using the wax Wikki Stix, lay out your symbols on the cotton muslin sheets and press down so the sticks adhere to the fabric. For more intricate designs, groups with more time may choose to use quick-drying fabric glue as their resist material.
4. Add a small amount of watercolor paint to a water cup and mix to create your dye. Ukara cloth is traditionally dyed with indigo, but you may choose to include other colors in your piece.
5. Using paint brushes, begin to fill in the areas around your design with watercolors to dye the fabric. Continue painting all visible areas of the fabric. Let the paint dry.
6. Remove the Wikki Stix to reveal your wax resist-dye design! Discuss the meaning of your symbols and how you decided to represent each concept.

### Adaptation

Younger participants or those without much time may complete the activity using wax crayons on watercolor paper. Participants can draw their symbols onto watercolor paper using a light-colored crayon and then fill in the remaining areas with watercolor.

### Additional materials

Participants may look at examples of Nsibidi characters and the ideas they represent in the Ekpe secret society.

<https://www.africanhistoryextra.com/p/the-nsibidi-script-ca-600-1909-ce>