

Basic Detail Report



Altar (Asen)

Date

20th century

Primary Maker

Fon people

Medium

iron, cotton and plant fiber

Description

This object reflects the ritual importance of iron in connection with transformation to, or communication with, the spiritual realm. Iron is made and worked by blacksmiths, some of whom especially those in West Africa are also ritual specialists. By means of fire they transform a material of the earth into tools and weapons associated with the letting of blood in hunting, warfare, and circumcision. Their knowledge is considered secret and mysterious, and their products are essential to many activities of life from farming to rites of passage. As is typical of iron altar devices, this is made in the form of a staff so that they may be thrust into earthen altars. The

Asen, which includes a scene identifying a particular individual or family, is inserted in an earthen altar in a family ancestral shrine; it represents the most particularized use of iron: for communication with the dead.

Dimensions

Overall: 47 3/4 x 12 1/2 x 13 3/8 in. (121.3 x 31.8 x 34 cm)