



Stool

Date

not dated

Primary Maker

Bamileke people

Medium

wood and stain

Description

This piece is a marvelous example of the imaginative combinations and distortions of form that characterize Bamileke art. Bamileke forms are boldly expressive and, simultaneously, architectonic. They frequently use the human figure, animals, or some combination of the two forms as caryatid supports of furniture, drums, and bowls as well as on architectural elements such as posts and lintels and doorframes. The figure style is classic Bamileke, especially the irregularly carved, compartmentalized, chinless face. The characteristic form for Grassfields stools consists of a round seat with slightly raised, rounded rim, and openwork cylindrical support on

an open ring base. The openwork forms here—a human astride a leopard with a human face—overwhelm and almost obliterate the recognizable stool seat and base. The human figure depicts a nobleman as indicated by the prestige cap he wears. His position astride the leopard suggests royal powers, yet he holds out a bowl (the stool's seat) in his hands, which seems to be a gesture of humility. Perhaps he should be seen as a Fon making offering to his royal ancestors. Leopards are symbols of royal lineage and prerogatives. A Fon has the right to any leopards killed by hunters in his domain. All Fons in the Grassfields keep numerous ornate stools in their treasure houses, mostly stools that belonged to their predecessors. At least one of the stools would have been carved for the current Fon's personal use. They all function as insignia of royal authority and are displayed, along with other insignia, on state occasions. Only important people have the right to be seated.

Dimensions

Overall: 26 3/8 x 11 1/4 x 17 7/8 in. (67 x 28.6 x 45.4 cm)