

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

The Art of Daily Life: Portable Objects from Southeast Africa

The Cleveland Museum of Art

April 16, 2011–February 26, 2012

Unless otherwise noted, all the works included in this publication can tentatively be dated from the mid 19th to the mid 20th century. Many were taken from Africa as souvenirs or as loot by soldiers at the end of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 or the South African War of 1899–1901.

* not in exhibition

1 HEADREST

Shona people, Zimbabwe

Wood; H. 14 cm (5½ in.)

Private collection

2 ANTELOPE HEADREST

Possibly Tsonga people, South Africa

Wood, glass beads, wildebeest hair, animal teeth; H. 11.4 cm (4½ in.)

Drs. Noble and Jean Endicott

This kind of realistically carved zoomorphic Tsonga headrest is quite rare. It consists of two horizontal planes joined by a vertical support in the shape of what appears to be an antelope. Strings of blue beads attached to the support add greatly to the object's appeal. Such headrests served both to protect the elaborate coiffure of the sleeper and as "dream machines," metaphysically relating the user to his ancestors.

3 HEADREST

Tsonga people, South Africa, or Shona people, Zimbabwe

Wood, glass beads, plant fiber; H. 12.7 cm (5 in.)

National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (Museum purchase, 89-14-26)

4 HEADREST/STAFF

Tsonga people, Mozambique and South Africa

Wood; L. 61 cm (24 in.)

Private collection, courtesy Donald Morris Gallery, Michigan/New York

Cherished personal objects, headrests were often carried along on journeys. This combination of a headrest and a staff exemplifies the portable nature of

much of the art of the region. Typically compact in size and light in weight, with the walking stick serving as a carrying handle, such traveling headrests were invented in the 19th century by Tsonga carvers in Mozambique and adjacent South Africa.

5 DOUBLE HEADREST WITH CHAIN LINKS AND SNUFF CONTAINERS

Tsonga people, South Africa

Wood; H. 15.2 cm (6 in.)

Betsy S. Aubrey and E. Steve Lichtenberg

The fact that the two headrests, links, and containers are all carved from a single piece of wood is testimony to the virtuosity of the object's maker. However, the idea that such double headrests were used as pillows by a husband and his wife relies on a Eurocentric bias. Both headrests and snuff containers allude to communication with the ancestral world through dreams and tobacco consumption, respectively.

6 HEADREST

Zulu people, South Africa, or Swazi people, Swaziland

Wood; H. 10.2 cm (4 in.)

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund 2010.198

As pillows, headrests served to protect the elaborate coiffures highly fashionable until the early to mid-20th century, and their use also enhanced contact with the ancestral realm through dreams. Their remains in Great Zimbabwe, other ancient ruins, and abandoned 12th-century burial caves attest to the region's longstanding tradition of producing and using headrests.

7 HEADREST

Swazi people, Swaziland
Wood; H. 20.3 cm (8 in.)
Private collection

The shape of this headrest alludes to cattle. The appendage in the center of the platform's underside represents an umbilical hernia or even a phallus. The two tail-like extensions suggest that two animals are being portrayed, facing in opposite directions but converging at the navel. The bovine references derive from the fact that these animals are a source of wealth but also act as mediators between the living and the dead.

8,* 9 TWO HEADRESTS

Zulu people, South Africa
Wood; H. 11.4 cm (4½ in.) | Wood; H. 17.8 cm (7 in.)
Private collection

Though exceptionally large in size, this headrest is carved in classical Zulu style. Intense usage over time has given the fine, reddish hardwood—a material typically reserved for leaders and other dignitaries—a rich, glossy patina. Headrests were also part of the paraphernalia of diviners because the objects were able to provoke dreams, considered a source of knowledge required to solve disputes and accomplish other challenging goals.

10 PIPE

Xhosa people, South Africa
Wood, tin, glass beads, sinew, leather; L. 20.3 cm (8 in.)
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund 2010.199

11 BUFFALO PIPE

Xhosa people, South Africa
Wood, lead; L. 14.6 cm (5¾ in.)
Harry and Diane Greenberg

12 PIPE

Xhosa people, South Africa
Wood, iron, copper alloy; L. 19.7 cm (7¾ in.)
National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (Museum purchase, 89-14-17)

A pipe's considerable wear and tear is an obvious sign of intense use. Often, as a result of continuous handling, the light color of the wood darkens over time and receives a deep, glossy patina. Pipes were frequently given as wedding presents or as gifts to maintain harmonious family or kinship ties. As prized family heirlooms, pipes were regularly passed down from one generation to the next and used only on special occasions.

13 PIPE

Xhosa people, South Africa
Wood, metal; L. 13.3 cm (5¼ in.)
National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (James Smithson Society, 89-8-23)

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14 PIPE

Southern Nguni people, South Africa, or Southern Sotho people, Lesotho
Wood, iron; H. 37.5 cm (14¾ in.)
National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (Museum purchase, 89-14-16)

The missing stopper of this superb pipe in the elegant form of a woman's sensuous body was most likely carved in the shape of a woman's head. Although used by both genders, male artists typically made pipes. This sculpture's aesthetic excellence, expressed in its design as much as in its craftsmanship, reinforces the belief that tobacco products were associated with generous and powerful humans and ancestral spirits alike.

15, 16, 17 THREE SNUFF CONTAINERS

Undetermined ethnic origin, southern Africa
Gourd, brass and copper wirework; H. 6 cm (2¾ in.) |
Gourd, brass and copper wirework; H. 5.7 cm (2¼ in.) |
Gourd, brass and copper wirework; H. 7.5 cm (3 in.)
National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (James Smithson Society, 89-8-28)

Snuff containers made out of a gourd—the hard shell of the fruit of the *Oncoba spinosa* tree—and decorated with wirework were widespread in southern Africa. The shape and material of gourd snuff containers suggest they would have been made for female users. Like a woman's womb, the gourd contains and nurtures the seed. Thus, the materials and the forms of snuff containers allude to procreation and fecundity.

18, 19 TWO SNUFF CONTAINERS

Zulu people, South Africa | Shona people, Zimbabwe
Horn; H. 8.9 cm (3½ in.) | Wood, reed, copper alloy; H.
5.4 cm (2 1/8 in.)
National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C. (Museum purchase, 89-14-14 and 89-
14-11)

20 SNUFF CONTAINER

Shona people, Zimbabwe
Wood, brass wire; H. 21 cm (8¼ in.)
Rosemary and Michael Roth

A preparation of powdered and processed tobacco, snuff has been widely used in Africa since the introduction of tobacco on the continent by Europeans in the 16th century. It was typically offered to visitors and shared among friends—a way of establishing or solidifying harmonious social relationships. Used by men and women alike, snuff containers were attached to cloaks or carried in bags, or they adorned the neck, arm, or waist.

21 SNUFF CONTAINER

Northern Nguni people, South Africa
Wood, glass beads, nut shell, cotton thread; H. 20.3 cm (8 in.)
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund
2010.201

22 SNUFF CONTAINER

Southern Sotho people, Lesotho
Horn; H. 40.6 cm (16 in.)
National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C. (Museum purchase, 89-14-1)

The austere form and shiny patina of this elegant portable object testify to its maker's extraordinary skills and care. It was most likely a display piece created for a chief. Such horn snuff containers would have been inspired by the pin-tailed whydah, or widowbird, which has long white and black tail feathers. The use of cattle horn denotes the connection between cattle as a source of wealth and the ancestral connotations of tobacco snuffing.

23, 24* TWO SNUFF CONTAINERS

Southern Sotho people, Lesotho
Horn; H. 10.8 cm (4¼ in.) | Horn, wood; H. 20.3 cm (8 in.)
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund
2010.202 | Private collection

25, 26 TWO SNUFF CONTAINERS

Zulu people, South Africa | Possibly Northern Nguni people, South Africa
Gourd, glass beads, plant fiber; H. 14 cm (5½ in.) | Gourd, glass beads; H. 9.5 cm (3¾ in.)
National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C. (James Smithson Society, 89-8-25) |
Patricia and Robert Weiner

27 SNUFF CONTAINER

Xhosa people, South Africa
Hide, earth, blood; H. 9.5 cm (3¾ in.)
National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C. (Museum purchase, 89-14-15)

Modeled over a clay core, the uncanny mixture used to make this snuff container was removed after hardening into a leathery material. Such snuff containers were believed to have protective powers, as the substances used to make them came from the hides of animals offered to the ancestors.

28, 29 LIDDED VESSELS

Swazi people, Swaziland, or Northern Nguni or Zulu people, South Africa
Wood; H. 53.9 cm (21¼ in.) Wood; H. 33.6 cm (13¼ in.)
Private collection, courtesy Robert Dowling, San Francisco

Because the few known examples of these vessels are stylistically and technically so similar, they may be the work of a single workshop, if not artist. Nothing is known with certainty about their original function or the meaning of their striking linear decoration. Given the lack of traces of wear and usage, such vessels may have been carved for sale to outsiders, most likely Europeans.

30 LIDDED VESSEL

Swazi people, Swaziland, or Northern Nguni or Zulu people, South Africa
Wood; H. 58.4 cm (23 in.)
Private collection

Containers wrapped in an integrally carved surrounding structure are extremely rare. Because none of the surviving examples appears to have held a liquid substance, it is possible that these virtuoso works served as display objects for chiefs and kings. They may also have been used by important individuals to store snuff, the lid functioning as a cup to distribute the contents during festivals in honor of the ancestors.

31 SPOON

Zulu people, South Africa
Wood; H. 31.1 cm (12¼ in.)
Private collection

This unusual spoon's deep patina and the subtle erosion of its sensuous contours indicate repeated usage in the daily preparation and/or serving of food—consumption is customarily done with the fingers. The female imagery may suggest that the spoon was purchased by a husband as part of his *lobola* (bride-price or dowry) and would be returned to his wife's family upon her death.

32, 33 TWO SNUFF SPOONS

Zulu people, South Africa
Bone; H. 15.2 cm (6 in.) Bone; H. 17.8 cm (7 in.)
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Dori and Daniel Rootenberg, Jacaranda Tribal, New York 2010.233 and 2010.234

Often, snuff spoons made from the rib of an ox or cow were subtly carved to suggest a female body. Decorated with incised designs blackened with cattle fat and ash, many are true hybrid objects, combining a spoon with a long-tined comb or hairpin. Such spoons were typically worn as ornaments in the hair or even the beard, thus signaling the social standing of their wearer.

34, 35 TWO SNUFF SPOONS/COMBS

Northern Nguni people, South Africa
Bone; H. 18.7 cm (7⅝ in.) Bone; H. 20 cm (7⅞ in.)
National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (James Smithson Society, 89-8-67 and 89-8-69)

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36, 37,* 38 THREE SPOONS

Zulu people, South Africa
Wood; H. 34.3 cm (13½ in.) Wood; H. 40 cm (15¾ in.)
Wood; H. 31.1 cm (12¼ in.)
Phillips Collection

39 BEER SKIMMER

Zulu people, South Africa
Wood; L. 55.2 cm (21¾ in.)
Dede and Oscar Feldman

Such a spoon was used to skim the locally brewed sorghum millet-based beer. The blackened surface of the wood is decorated with the beloved *amasumpa* (warts or bumps) motif, once reserved for the Zulu royal family. Applied to various object genres, the gridlike design represents wealth in the form of cattle. References to cattle on beer skimmers and beer vessels invoke the ancestors.

40, 41 TWO VESSELS

Zulu people, South Africa
Terracotta; H. 30.5 cm (12 in.) Terracotta; H. 40.6 cm (16 in.)
Bill and Gail Simmons Private collection

This type of pot was used to transport beer or water. Its spherical form, associated with the female body, was meant to maximize capacity, while the neck helped keep the liquid from spilling. It is decorated with relief patterns that are a variant on the *amasumpa* motif, invented at the Zulu court in the 19th century. Meaning "warts," the motif symbolizes a herd of cattle and evokes the ancestors' guidance and the blessing of their descendants.

42 MILK PAIL

Zulu people, South Africa
Wood; H. 45.7 cm (19¾ in.)
Frank F. Williams

This type of milk vessel was made and used by a man. For southern African pastoralists, cattle signaled wealth and milk was their most important food. Despite its nonfigurative shape, the pail's elongated, swelled form alludes to a human torso. The geometric designs carved in low relief on the surface accentuate its smooth curves and lustrous patina, a result of many years of daily use and care.

43 FOUR-LEGGED VESSEL

Southern Sotho people, Lesotho
Wood; H. 25.4 cm (10 in.)
Private collection

This simple yet sumptuous container, with its striking pokerwork surface decoration and four legs, seems to be one of a kind. The overall design and the type of wood from which it was carved make it closely resemble a ceramic vessel. The swelling and tapering form of the loops connecting the bowl to the base suggest cattle horns, and the vessel's unusual elevated shape and lustrous patina imply a ritual purpose.

44 KNOBKERRIE

Zulu people, South Africa
Wood; H. 66 cm (26 in.)
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Dori and Daniel Rootenberg, Jacaranda Tribal, New York 2010.232

Relatively short sticks were traditionally used for hunting and fighting and are customarily called knobkerries. The name refers to the characteristic spherical knob of wood or head atop a cylindrical shaft. The knobs could be decorated with copper or brass studs or carved in various shapes and forms. This heavily patinated non-figurative club, with its sliced-off spherical knob, exemplifies a classic Zulu style.

45 KNOBKERRIE

Zulu people, South Africa
Rhinoceros horn; H. 52.1 cm (20½ in.)
Drs. Noble and Jean Endicott

46 KNOBKERRIE

Swazi people, Swaziland
Wood; H. 66 cm (26 in.)
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund 2010.203

47 SNUFF KERRIE

Zulu people, South Africa
Wood; H. 50.8 cm (20 in.)
Private collection

Another example of a hybrid sculpture, this kerrie has a snuff container in its knob, complete with a conically shaped stopper. Longitudinal grooves carved into the knob allude to an exotic fruit pod. Its deep, glossy patina suggests repeated usage. Rather than being used as fighting sticks by warriors in battle, such clubs were probably carried ostentatiously by elite men to denote their elevated status.

48 PRESTIGE STAFF

Zulu people, South Africa
Wood; H. 180.3 cm (71 in.)
Private collection

49 PRESTIGE STAFF

Possibly Tsonga people, South Africa
Wood; H. 154.9 cm (61 in.)
Private collection, courtesy Sotheby's, New York

50 PRESTIGE STAFF

Northern Nguni people, South Africa
Wood; H. 147 cm (58 in.)
Dr. Gary van Wyk and Lisa Brittan, Axis Gallery, New York

The property of a ritual healer, a serpent staff like this example would have served as a divining rod. Typically, these staffs were crowned by a spherical knob and decorated with one, two, or even three intertwining coiled snakes along the shaft, often spiraling up the full length of the stick. In southern Africa, snakes signify the ancestors and, thus, are treated with great respect and never killed.

51 PRESTIGE STAFF

Tsonga or Zulu people, South Africa
Wood; H. 116.8 cm (46 in.)
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund 2010.205

52, 53 TWO PRESTIGE STAFFS

Tsonga or Zulu people, South Africa

Wood; H. 87.5 cm (34½ in.) Wood; H. 92.7 cm (36½ in.)

Jane and Gerald Katcher Randy Fertel

54, 55 TWO STAFFS

Probably Tsonga people, Mozambique and South Africa

Wood; H. 109.2 cm (43 in.) Wood; H. 120.7 cm (47½ in.)

Private collection The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund 2010.204

This figurative staff and the one beside it have both been attributed to an itinerant Tsonga artist who would have been active in the Zulu kingdom in the late 19th century. Although mother-and-child finials were his favorite subject, he also created a number of staffs that include images of one or two baboons in their finial decoration—hence, his designation as the “Baboon Master.”

56, 57 TWO STAFF FINIALS

Probably Tsonga people, Mozambique and South Africa

Wood; H. 30 cm (11¾ in.) Wood; H. 30.8 cm (12 in.)

Jane and Gerald Katcher Private collection

Like the other example here, this figure was removed from the stick it once surmounted, a practice driven by a desire to transform a utilitarian object into a small sculpture in order to meet European ideas about “high art.” Based on their stylistic affinities, these two staff finials were made by the same hand in the late 19th or early 20th century, most likely a Tsonga immigrant from Mozambique who established himself in Natal.

58 DANCE STAFF

Zulu or Tsonga-Shangaan people, South Africa

Wood, brass, copper; H. 86.4 cm (34 in.)

Phillips Collection

Among the Zulu and Tsonga-Shangaan, carefully carved and appliquéd dance staffs were among the many accouterments of the *ingoma* costume. The geometric shapes decorating this staff’s finial suggest a schematic representation of a female figure. In the past, among an isolated Nguni group in Malawi, abstract human-shaped staffs used in the traditional *ingoma* performance were treated like feminine dance partners.

59 DANCE STAFF

Southern Sotho people, Lesotho

Wood, glass beads; H. 74.3 cm (29¼ in.)

Private collection

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60* AXE

Ndebele (Matabele) or Shona people, Zimbabwe

Wood, wirework, iron; H. 40.1 cm (16 in.)

Private collection

61 AXE

Probably Tsonga people, South Africa

Wood, iron, glass seed beads; H. 64 cm (25 in.)

Dr. Gary van Wyk and Lisa Brittan, Axis Gallery, New York

62 AXE

Shona people, Zimbabwe, or Venda people, South Africa and Zimbabwe

Wood, iron; H. 73.3 cm (28¾ in.)

Private collection

Though mainly geometric and abstract, this axe features some figurative elements in its elegant design. The handle seems to be topped by a representation of some sort of vessel, and the conical projections along its shaft obviously reference breasts. While owned and used exclusively by a man, this axe, like many other ritual weapons in southern Africa, was symbolically perceived to be of female gender.

63 KNIFE WITH SHEATH

Shona people, Zimbabwe

Wood, metal, sinew; H. 52.1 cm (20½ in.)

Private collection

A large knife with an elaborately carved wooden handle and sheath and a double-edged blade had important ritual and ceremonial connotations.

Used by healer-diviners and spirit mediums, knives delivered messages to the ancestors. The relief patterns gracing the sculptural parts are purely decorative, simply meant to enhance the knife's beauty.

64 KNIFE WITH SHEATH

Tswana (Western Sotho) people, South Africa and Botswana

Bone, sinew, wood, metal; H. 23.7 cm (9½ in.)

Private collection

65, 66* TWO BRIDAL TRAINS

Ndebele people, South Africa

Glass beads, cotton thread; H. 167.6 cm (66 in.) H. 198.1 cm (78 in.)

Suzanne Priebatsch and Natalie Knight

Such a beaded train, always made by a female artist, was worn hanging from the head or neck with the help of a headband or loop. Sometimes a woman would wear two such trains at once—one in the front, the other at the back. Part of a bride's elaborate costume, the train was called *nyoga*, or "snake," alluding to the way it moved along the ground during the bride's dance, much like a snake.

67 NECKLACE

Northern Nguni people, South Africa

Glass beads, bone, sinew; L. 38.1 cm (15 in.)

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Dori and Daniel Rootenberg in memory of Estelle Rosenberg 2010.231

When wild game was still plentiful in the region, real animal claws would have been used to punctuate beaded prestige necklaces. Lion-claw necklaces were the exclusive property of royalty while the bone imitations were owned and worn by high-ranking individuals of lesser status. Large red glass beads were also reserved for the Nguni elite in the period before the destruction of the Zulu kingdom in 1879.

68,* 69* APRON AND BELT

Southern Sotho people, Lesotho Southern Sotho, Lesotho, or Northern Nguni people, South Africa

Glass seed beads, sinew, twine, seeds; H. 14 cm (5½ in.)

Grass core, cotton cloth and thread, glass seed beads, sinew, twine; L. 106 cm (42 in.)

Dr. Gary van Wyk and Lisa Brittan, Axis Gallery, New York

70* APRON

Southern Sotho people, Lesotho, or Northern Nguni people, South Africa

Glass seed beads, cotton thread, sinew; W. 26 cm (10¼ in.)

Private collection

71 NECK ORNAMENT

Northern Nguni people, South Africa

Glass beads, sinew, brass buttons; L. 68.6 cm (27 in.)

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund 2010.207

Typically such an ornament was worn by a woman in conjunction with other beadwork in complementary color schemes. In addition to making her own beadwork, however, a woman would also produce her husband's beadwork and, before marriage, the beadwork worn by the young man courting her. Before the introduction of glass beads by European traders, southern African communities acquired beads of Indian manufacture from Arab traders.

72 APRON

Southern Nguni people, South Africa

Leather, glass beads, sinew; H. 35.6 cm (14 in.)

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund 2010.206

This is an exquisite example of a rare type of swallowtail-shaped apron worn by young female initiates until the mid-19th century. On the upper portion, the black beads were applied in such a way that they can be read as a human face or even as a full figure. In fact, the overall form of the apron can be viewed as representing the lower torso and legs of a woman with a neatly marked pubic region.

73 PENDANT DOLL

Xhosa people, South Africa

Gourd, glass seed beads, mother-of-pearl buttons, cotton thread; H. 11.5 cm (4½ in.)

Dr. Gary van Wyk and Lisa Brittan, Axis Gallery, New York

Because wearing and using beads was seen as a manifestation of “pagan” culture, Xhosa who converted to Christianity would burn their beadwork to symbolize the break with the past. However, traditionally, beadwork was also buried with its owner. This doll was field-collected by German-born Grete Mannheim who operated a photography studio in Johannesburg from 1936 until she immigrated to the U.S. in 1949.

74 VEST

Mfengu people, South Africa

Glass beads, buttons, cotton thread; H. 59.7 cm (23½ in.)
Private collection

Mfengu beadwork is admired for the delicacy of its workmanship, a predilection for pink and blue beads in simple geometric patterns, and decorative rows of mother-of-pearl buttons. This double-paneled vest could have been worn by a man or a woman. Although stunning in itself, its visual impact would have been even greater in its original setting, complemented by other beaded garments and accessories.

75 DOLL

Ndebele people, South Africa

Glass beads, straw, cotton thread, sinew; H. 20.3 cm (8 in.)

Suzanne Priebatsch

The conical shape of Ndebele fertility figures derives from the belief that the form expresses the ideal female body. In real life, the shape is in part achieved by wearing beaded neck, leg, and body rings to thicken the limbs. Accessories decorating the figures faithfully imitate women’s dress. Often called “dolls,” they are not children’s playthings even though they are manipulated much like how mothers handle their children.

76 PENDANT DOLL

Southern Sotho people, Lesotho

Glass beads, mother-of-pearl button, sinew; H. 39.1 cm (15½ in.)

Private collection

77 DOLL

Southern Sotho people, Lesotho

Gourd, glass beads, hair; H. 11.4 cm (4½ in.)

Blanche and Charles Derby

Fertility figures like these were used during the initiation ceremonies of pubescent girls. Integrating talismanic materials in their fabrication, the figures were meant to guarantee fertility and prevent or cure barrenness—a gourd’s womblike shape and the seeds within symbolize fecundity. They are sometimes also called “child figures” because a young bride would care for them as she would for her future children, carrying them on her back and sleeping with them until her first child was born.

78 DOLL

Southern Sotho people, Lesotho

Wood, glass beads, sinew, metal; H. 25.4 cm (10 in.)

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund 2010.208

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