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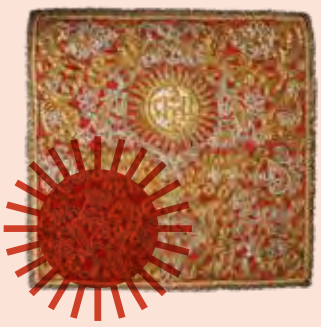


Under the direction of **Caroline Heering**
and **Anne-Marie Vuillemenot**

Art & Rite

The power of objects









PUL PRESSES UNIVERSITAIRES DE LOUVAIN

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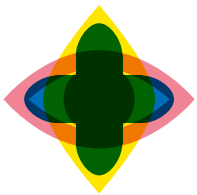

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Our warmest thanks to Musée L and its director Anne Querinjean for having offered us the opportunity of putting on the *Art & Rite* exhibition. Sincerest thanks, too, to our colleagues from the multi-disciplinary seminar put in place by Charlotte Langohr as well as the authors of the notes and summaries circulated throughout this process and, of course, to the entire team at Musée L, not to forget the institutions which generously lent works, adding richness and variety to the exhibition.

Caroline Heering and Anne-Marie Vuillemenot

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The Religions, Spiritualities, Cultures and Societies Research Institute brings together researchers whose work (at least in part) focuses on religions in their spiritual, cultural, societal and theological dimensions.

The Institute of Civilizations, Arts and Literature offers a home for researchers studying history, archaeology, heritage, history of art, musicology, philology, literature and theatre. Through complementary and inter-disciplinary practice, these researchers are engaged in a shared endeavour to contribute to a better scientific understanding of the various human cultures and civilizations, past and present.

Musée universitaire de Louvain

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Preface

This catalogue of the exhibition “Art & Rite. The power of objects” is the culmination of an incredibly creative process. It is the fruit of an interdisciplinary project, led by members of the academic community at UCLouvain, who wished to “use” the collections at Musée L as an inspiring and resonant source for research and teaching. Thinking of Musée L as a laboratory, whose objects and works of art are original and unique materials for holding seminars that bring together different disciplines – in this case theology, literature, anthropology, archaeology and art history – means making the objects speak in a new and different way. By appropriating the collections in topics, these teacher-researchers have initiated and then sharpened their original and informed viewpoints on the often unpublished objects kept at Musée L.

Conceived during informal discussions among colleagues, the “Art & Rite” project gradually took shape as part of the broader “Teaching and research at the heart of the laboratory-museum” programme, maintained by the Louvain 2020 Strategic Plan. The starting point for this programme was to invite the university community to handle the collections of Musée L more extensively, so that the material would become the basis for a dynamic dialogue among disciplines in the Human Sciences, thereby creating new perspectives for research and education. The laboratory-museum is therefore conceived as a privileged place for analysis and confrontation with the materiality of cultural production, located on the margins or at the crossroads of multiple human societies; an open laboratory that students, researchers and professors can enthusiastically take on. The content of the exhibition, its guiding threads and the solid reflections drawn up around the objects that you will find on the following pages, were all born of seminars organised within Musée L. These thematic seminars in turn blended different disciplinary prisms. By so doing, the members of the project examined the animating powers of the pieces and objects, starting with the numerous sensorial and spiritual ways of performing the rite through their uses. The different formats and performers in these ritual objects gradually took shape in the links they weave or unravel between shared symbolism and individual affect. What do painted canvases, sculptures, ornaments, masks, musical instruments and missiles have to say about the different possibilities invented and experienced from being in the world? How can we perceive today, once they have been well caulked in a museum, the density of life that these objects bear? A selection

of European religious works of art and ritual objects from non-European civilisations - Congo, Ladakh, Oceania-New Guinea - preserved in Musée L were thus examined, compared and discussed. While putting together material for the study, the wish quickly emerged to transmit the new cross-sectional knowledge thus generated to the general public by the specific means of holding a temporary exhibition. It is an exciting challenge, nourished by the generous pooling of the researchers' energy, intelligence and sensitivity; these same researchers are also the authors of the captivating texts in this catalogue. The exhibition and catalogue took shape thanks to the profoundly complementary involvement of two of the project's members – the exhibition curators, Anne-Marie Vuillemenot, an anthropologist, and Caroline Heering, an art historian, together with the team of the "Exhibition and Publishing Department" at Musée L.

It is therefore a project driven by a spirit of co-construction. The confrontation of points of view and expertise was often innovative, sometimes explosive. The methodological process that was followed proved to be a patient learning process to fertilize the exchange and shift the boundaries of a prepared reflection. Placing the art object at the centre of wonder, criticism, curiosity and contemporary questioning means at the same time considering its materiality, history, symbolism and its operating and acting power. The emotional intelligence of researchers has often been called upon to advance in the sensitive understanding of objects and rituals. The collections of Musée L, thanks to their astonishing diversity, are conducive to this approach. Perhaps without even actually realizing it, we have contributed to the creation of new "rites", whether it is a question of animating seminars, or activating objects from artistic and ritual practices, which when staged in an exhibition space, live "differently". May the richness of the different themes and approaches in this catalogue, which reflect the immense work of the organisers involved in the project, open up unexpected territories, thus enlarging the "interpretative communities" of both objects and rituals. We wish you a captivating initiatory journey!

Charlotte Langohr and Anne Querinjean

I would like to express my warmest gratitude to the members of the “Art & Rite” project for having crossed their trades and expertise.
I would particularly like to thank Professor and researcher Charlotte Langohr, the promoter of the whole project, for her rigour and finesse, always at the service of the whole.
This joint project is a fine example of new collaborations between Musée L and the university community.

My thanks, also, to the private collectors and lending institutions for their trust and professionalism; I should mention the *Musée royal de l’Afrique Centrale*, the *Musées royaux d’Art et d’Histoire*, the *Museum aan de Stroom*, the *Musée Mode & Dentelle*, the *Musée diocésain de Namur*, the *Trésor de Liège*, the *Piconrue – Musée de la Grande Ardenne*, the *Bibliothèque royale de Belgique* and the Archives Department at UCLouvain.

Anne Querinjean
Director of the Musée L

My warmest thanks to Emmanuelle Druart, who manages the Musée L collections as well as Clément Vandenberghe and Hélène Jacques, coordinators of the above-mentioned Projet Louvain 2020, for their precious and vital support in preparing the seminars, the exhibition and the catalogue. Finally, thank you to all the members of the *Art & Rite* project for their involvement and a fascinating collective research experience.

Charlotte Langohr
Qualified researcher F.R.S.-FNRS (FIAL/INCAL)
Promoter of Projet Louvain 2020
“Teaching and research at the heart of the Museum-laboratory**”**

Introduction

Rite and art

Rites and rituals are still clear as mud for researchers, and in particular for anthropologists. How and in what way? By focusing on the ritual logics at work in human societies, anthropologists have repeatedly shown that rites reveal a specific relationship to the world that forms part of a way of thinking in which humans not only address themselves to each other, but are open to multiple exchanges with their environment and the visible and invisible beings that fill it. At the same time, other studies show that rites do not merely determine relationships with and links to a divine transcendence, whatever that may be.

First observation: rites are rarely mentioned without an adjective or another noun attached; for example: rites of initiation, rites of passage, purification, transformation and reparation, etc. Moreover, this word - which has become a concept - takes on different meanings according to the context it is used in.

So for ethologists, rites as emotionally motivated conduct are also found in animals. In medicine, in psychiatry in particular, stereotypical conduct with no immediately observable necessity and with no apparent rationality can also be considered as a rite. At the very least, a rite is described as social conduct, repetitive, collective or not, which has no utilitarian or rational purpose (Rivière, 1995). In other words, a definition of a rite in no way allows us to make progress in our thinking, as the term undergoes multiple shifts of meaning depending on the context in which it is used, and the way in which different scientific disciplines approach it.

On the other hand, the conditions of a rite allow for much more interesting observations and reflections. This is firstly because these conditions immediately contextualise, and secondly because the debate is referred back to the boundaries of space-time that are either side by side or which overlap. Since not everything is a rite, we should consider a time of change within the rite and a time for leaving the rite; moments that break the rhythm of everyday life to open up a particular space-time where "something happens"[1]. This something may be the result of one or more organised actions which, when put together, enable a transformation in the initial order of things. Moreover, this transformation will only be possible if particular techniques also contribute to the establishment of a ritual. Finally, one or more people are in charge of these actions, all concerted by the intervention of a ritualizer who in one

[1] With reference to the book by Jean During, *Quelque chose se passe : Le sens de la tradition dans l'Orient musical*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 1994.

way or another conducts the rite. One theoretical current has in particular developed this perspective of rite-action[2].

Art. Just like with rites themselves, the scientific theories that accompany them could fill entire libraries. Once again, trying to define a rite is a trap. An analogical reflection of the artistic practices linked to the universe of the rite provides meeting points for artistic otherness, as conceived and imagined in all human societies. In this respect, especially as rites, art and its many cultural manifestations, all nourish the multidisciplinary perspective of the seminar and the debate initiated by this exhibition - a debate that is enriched when it comes to harmonising the complexity of ritual practices invested with an artistic concern and their exhibition in the museum.

Some artists devote their production specifically to the ritual sphere, producing objects that initially have a function and a place in the ritual order. In addition, and most particularly, the production of the beautiful, the aesthetic, the noble, even the extraordinary, allows for ritual effectiveness in the sense that it is part of the exception and of something that goes beyond the everyday. The alliance of art and rite also takes place according to particular contexts, and it takes on different meanings from one society to another, from one human group to another, from one individual to another. **AMV**

[2] Michael Houseman and Carlo Severi, *Naven or the other self: A Relational Approach to Ritual Action*, Leiden, Brill, 2018.

Rite and the importance of objects

Combining art and rite is not self-evident in contemporary Western mentalities. Indeed, art is seen today as a place for creativity and originality; by contrast, rite is often understood in the trivialized sense of rule and routine, or of religious ceremony belonging to the Elsewhere in space (distant lands) or in time (obsolete or primitive practices). The anthropology of the contemporary world shows, however, that rites are practised incessantly in fields as diverse as politics, sports, student life, leisure and the media, but it also notes that there is no necessary awareness of the ritual character by the actors[3]. Just as Mr Jourdain spoke in prose without realising it, most of the time, rites are also performed unknowingly. It is the fact of being suddenly deprived of them, like in a pandemic, that brings to light the importance of rites both in everyday situations (greeting each other, having meals together, etc.) and in exceptional situations (celebrating weddings, burying the dead, etc.). Rites are ongoing support for the social actions of the living. Bernard Kaempf

[3] Philippe Oliviero et al., *Enjeux du rite dans la modernité*, Paris, Recherches de Science Religieuse, 1991.

sums up their functions in these terms: “rites socialise and identify, they make sense and make things intelligible. They reassure or reinforce the subject and enable him to face up to the challenge of the present”[4].

In simple terms, a rite is a gamble on taking over a form that is deemed effective because it has previously worked in a similar situation, and adapting it to the needs of the moment. And yet unlike a code or *habitus*, the action here is invested with a meaning that goes beyond the pragmatic and the rational: it is given a higher meaning of a symbolic type, which assures its power. Example: waving a white flag to stop the battle. The result is neither logical nor empirical, because advancing unarmed is rather the best way to expose yourself to being killed. However, hostilities cease in the presence of this sign, because the two camps share a common key of interpretation, which in the West has appealed to the honour of the combatants since the late eighteenth century: to ignore this sign would be to deprive humanity of its dignity. The effectiveness of this rite is therefore based on the exaltation of values shared by the actors and witnesses, which produces an emotional impact linked to their identity.

Think of a familiar rite such as marriage; all its components can be found in the definition of the rite put forward by Claude Rivière, which is based on invariants: “A set of relatively codified individual or collective behaviours, with a more or less repetitive physical, verbal, gestural or postural support, and a strong symbolic charge for the actors and usually for their witnesses, based on a mental, possibly unconscious adherence to values relating to social choices considered important and whose expected effectiveness is not based on a purely empirical logic that would be exhausted in the technical instrumentality of the cause-effect relationship”[5].

Alongside this definition of the rite in essence, it can also be understood through usage. Indeed, if a rite is a conduct with symbolic value, it is not so much the ingredients of the ritual conduct that matter but rather the way in which they are invested with a particular meaning. Example: following a pancake recipe means applying a code, but taking my grandmother’s recipe that “makes the best pancakes in the world” is an emotional rite that celebrates and reinforces my family identity. Denis Jeffrey observes how common activities, such as drinking or eating can be ritualised, and notes that the same practice can take on different meanings depending on situations, individuals’ beliefs, their social and religious identities, etc. When an individual reproduces a ritual, they adhere to meanings and values that affirm one of their social and individual identities. In a word, “identity creates rites and rites create identity”[6].

These two definitions both emphasize that a rite is *an action*. A rite comprises a set of rules whose observance conditions the production of the expected effects; while it leaves room for improvisation to adhere to the present, it is based on the resumption (in both the sense of

[4] Bernard Kaempf, *Rites et ritualités*, Paris & Ottawa, Le Cerf & Lumen Vitae and Novalis, 2000, p. 29.

[5] Claude Rivière, *Les rites profanes*, Paris, P.U.F., 1995, p. 11.

[6] Denis Jeffrey, «Distinguer le rite du non-rite», in Jeffrey Denis and Cardita Ângelo, *La Fabrication des rites*, Québec, Presses de l’université Laval, 2015, pp. 12-13.

reproduction and adjustment to oneself) of a model which is recognised as relevant because it is symbolically significant. A rite therefore sets out stages and roles that can be adapted to various types of clothing. Jean-Yves Hameline analyses how a rite takes place in a *particular space and moment, distinct* from the ordinary course of life, requiring the appropriate *decor and clothing*. Participants have a *specific role* to play within a *scenario whose order of sequences is fixed* in advance. *Bodily action* is accomplished in a way with the aid of *objects*[7]. All rites are therefore based on immemorial or memorial knowledge; they are sometimes the subject of organised transmission, taught orally or codified in writing, handed down through experience or as part of an initiation, etc. These instructions are called rituals. Even when the gesture is performed in solitude, "the individual rite is performed by a person using a collective scenography"[8], says Claude Rivière, and this scenography is always adapted to oneself.

Art and rite are therefore correlated by both being *anchored in previous knowledge* and by a *creative relationship with the object*[9]. Whatever the time and culture (i.e. identities) involved, the rites invented by mankind to act on reality need objects in order to function. Many of them have no prior ritual function but are activated within the framework of a ritualised scenario. Example: a hat is used to protect a person's head, but removing the hat while bowing is a sign of respect in the context of a greeting rite. Objects, accompanied by beliefs, gestures, words, sounds and smells are part of a set of actions that endow them with meaning within a determined ritual space and time. Some objects are created intentionally for a ritual. For example: the crucifix is the support for the contemplation of the incarnate divinity and the sacrifice of Christ in Christian worship, and as such, a sign of identity recognition.

Rites, performed in an individual or collective scenario, testify to the appropriation of the culture that individuals share with their environment. "We can only define a rite after the belief has been defined", says Durkheim[10]. Indeed, for a rite to take place, it must be based on shared values. In this regard, rites say something about the identity of users. It follows that the use of the objects integrated into the rites can only be decoded by people initiated into the same presuppositions, who together form an "interpretative community"[11]. We can then fully grasp the role of museums, which collect, preserve and protect these objects in order to restore their full depth of meaning as supports for rites whose concerns they shed light on, but also as creations invested with uniqueness, to be viewed as works of art. **MWD**

[7] Jean-Yves Hameline, *Une poétique du rituel*, Paris, Cerf, 1977.

[8] Rivière, *op. cit.*, p. 15. Cf. also Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Jeux, rituels, gestes. Les fondements mimétiques de l'action sociale*, Paris, Anthropos, 2004. Ritual is mimetic, but the meaning on which the rite is based and the scenario for its implementation can be strictly individual (my secret talisman, my fetish gesture to give me courage); it can degenerate into pathology (the monomania of serial killers).

[9] Myriam Watthee-Delmotte (ed.), *Rite et création*, Paris, Hermann, 2020.

[10] Émile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, [1925], Paris, P.U.F., 1968, p. 50.

[11] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1980.

Thinking the object under the prism of ritual

Reflecting on the relationship between art and rite means remembering that the primary function of many of the so-called artistic objects of the past, preserved today in our museums, was to serve a rite, a function from which they took on meaning. This "functional" dimension should not make us lose sight of their discernible qualities, which have been and can remain a source of wonder, acting on our senses but also on our perception of the gestures, time and space that were intimately linked to them.

In order to understand their meanings today in their historical context, and in particular in the context of their practice, we cannot limit ourselves to just studying them as isolated entities from a strictly stylistic or typological perspective (consisting of considering each type of object in relation to the whole to which it belongs). These objects only exist and make sense through a series of relationships: relationships with the people who ordered, produced and handled them, and also with time (marked by moments charged with meaning: birth, marriage, mourning, liturgical celebrations etc.) and space (a church, for example, is structured into distinct hierarchical zones of sacrality); relations between these different objects as well (a chalice is linked to a paten, etc.), and with the prescriptive frameworks that legitimise them and dictate their uses. It is therefore important to contextualise such objects and to understand them within this system of complex relationships in which they contribute to their religious, and also aesthetic, symbolic and social functions.

Placed at the centre of attention, the ritual objects in this exhibition invite us to explore, that is to say to think together or converse about what has been contested, the contradictions on which the museum institution was built, as well as the history of art, of which it is in a way the temple. By opening up the field of reflection to anthropology, theology or literary studies - an interdisciplinary approach which was that of the seminar at the origin of this exhibition - rites in fact allow us to think about the mobile borders - and the historical conditions of construction of these borders - between different categories which have long polarised discourse in art history. We will take as a starting point for our reflection the objects of Catholic worship, and more broadly, of Christian culture, of which Musée L has a rich collection. Often left to one side in museums or in scientific studies, many of the objects gathered here are hybrid objects, crossing the boundaries between artistic mediums and genres. More than this, these often anonymous, decorative and popular objects lead us to think of the "repressed" objects in Western culture, in the words of Christine

Buci-Glucksmann[12], and to cross the boundaries between the noble and the decorative or the major and the minor, and also between the pure and the impure or the masculine and the feminine.

Let us first consider the relationship between creation and reception. This is a highly structuring division: one is either a creator, or a spectator and receiver. But what happens when you are both at the same time? This is the case for certain objects made in women's convents, such as paperolle reliquaries and various pieces of needlework. The creators of the ritual objects are also the recipients. Through the repetition, rhythm and cadence of their devotional gestures, accompanied by certain words or prayers uttered, the nuns have produced objects that preserve the memory of these creative rites. This rituality, which saturates and often presides over the making of these objects, finds an echo in all the rites that structure and modulate their uses. Bearers of these primary intentions, the objects were in fact the support, by the side of their users, of a series of rites, both public (such as the embroidered liturgical textiles used during mass) and private (such as the paperolle reliquaries used in private devotion as small oratories).

This type of object invites us to think of another kind of sharing, dating back to the Renaissance, one that differentiates, and sometimes opposes, art and craftsmanship. Most of the objects exhibited here belong or have long belonged to the category of craftsmanship, and more recently to another problematic category: that of "folk art", engaging another difference, between common people and scholars or elite fine art lovers. Independently of these categories, whose rich historiography would take too long to unfold here, let us at least note that many of the objects presented in this exhibition are characterised by DIY art, governed by a cumulative and combinatorial logic. We could say that in this field the so-called minor or popular arts mimic the major or noble arts, while distinguishing themselves by some kind of extra or emphasis that plays on the apprehension of the objects by the senses.

Closely related to this hierarchy is the distinction between the richness and poverty of the materials used. While many ritual objects are the result of hefty financial investment, their added value often comes from the care taken in the ornamentation made of materials that are not necessarily noble, such as paper, wax and silk thread. The impression of richness and preciousness is the result of refined craftsmanship, creating wonders (*mirabilia*) that can lead to the miracle (*miraculum*, a term whose root also refers to sight). Arte povera (poverty is fully assumed in convents) takes on all the appearances of the rich: paper imitates goldsmith's work, painting imitates marble, embroidery and needlework rival painting, but also and above all, nature itself.

The characteristic of this decor is in fact that it frequently plays on the borderline between the natural and the artificial, imitating, for instance, a proliferating and exuberant nature. The imitation here is not so much a mimetic transcription of nature's various species as a reproduction of

[12] Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Philosophie de l'ornement. D'Orient en Occident*, Paris, éd. Galilée, 2008.

its diversity, abundance and generative force - thus blurring another distinction, that between naturalism and stylisation. This ornamentation is characterised by a certain horror of emptiness. Far from being reduced to an overload that lacks thickness or balance, it can actually endow some of these objects with an almost organic dimension, testifying to the expressive power of the ornamentation.

Thus, while building bridges between these traditional opposites, the concept of ornamentation is shown to be a particularly operative concept for understanding the power of these objects within ritual. All the objects gathered here are characterised by the same care given to ornamentation. Their chimerical or voluble convolutions, their colours, their brilliance and rhythm - in brief, their density of presence - attract the eye, animate the object and make it attractive. Faced with the emptiness of absence, ornamentation fills, structures and reassures. Through its grain, texture and reflections, ornamentation gives the object a surplus of life. It breathes life into inanimate artefacts. On many of the objects exhibited here, the abundant ornamentation even tends to become the main element, sometimes to the point of eclipsing or even masking what it is intended to adorn, a reversal between the ornamental and the ornate that reminds us that ornamentation is also capable of rethinking the relationship between centre and margin or periphery, between principal and accessory. To use terms from the field of philosophy, in which ornament was thought up, we might say that ornament produces an "increase in being" (Gadamer[13]) or an "enlargement of its sphere of existence" (Simmel[14]). In other words, it increases the value of the object decorated, which is often a sacred value, as the ornament deploys its sphere of effectiveness in a register that is both axiological and aesthetic. It is this supplement of beauty, this excess, that supports the rite, so to speak. In other words, it becomes a powerful activator of the belief in the efficacy of the rite. Ornament, however, should not be understood as something to cover up one's misery, intended to embellish something ugly or of little value. As all the pieces presented here show, according to the logic of "because it is worth it", the ornament always embellishes and enhances something that already boasts its own dignity from the outset: relics, a pious image, the body of prelates, the chalice containing the wine of the Eucharist, etc. It is this inherent value of the thing ornamented that the ornament should show and demonstrate in a sensitive way. Ornamenting means honouring.

We should not forget that the boundary between the fine arts and the decorative arts was built up precisely on the distinction and sometimes the opposition between the beautiful and the useful, or between gratuitousness and necessity. The term "object", chosen as a subtitle for this exhibition, refers to the purpose for which these pieces are used in ritual. The objects presented here do not, like modern paintings, enjoy an autonomous aesthetic existence. The apparent aesthetic autonomy of the objects that we contemplate in museums today is conferred on them by this new framework of presentation. Just as the reliquary does not exist without the relic - and the relic does not exist without the

[13] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, pp. 72-89.

[14] Georg Simmel, *Essays on art and aesthetics*, trans. Austin Harrington, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2020.

reliquary - the objects in Catholic ritual have no meaning outside the framework of the ritual for which they were created. This dependence on a function that is beyond them and to which they are subject is fundamental - and paradoxically this is characteristic of the decorative arts (arts that therefore do no more than decorate): the chalice should contain the consecrated wine, the chasuble should clothe the priest, etc. This dependency on use is coupled with a dependency on a whole, which the object forms part of. The objects of Catholic worship thus regularly form part of groups structured by relationships and hierarchies, groups unified by... ornament! It is no coincidence that textile pieces that were once part of sets made up of pieces of the same fabric, ornament and colour (comprising a chasuble, a maniple, a stole, a chalice veil, a corporal burse, and in richer churches or cathedrals, one or more copes, two dalmatics, a humeral veil, an altar parament) are all called “ornaments”.

Once again, the combination of rite and ornament - one could say of ornament as a visual rite - allows us to think of religion and aesthetics together. In this regard we might speak of an aesthetic functionality or an aesthetic of the rite. The primary meaning of the term *ornamentum* (like that of *decorum*) clearly refers to this matching of form and function. It comes from Greek (*kosmos* in Greek designates the order of the world as the ornament and equipment of the warrior), referring to both the idea of beauty and the idea of order and convenience, i.e. suitability for a given function, or even what ensures its efficiency or effectiveness, the very opposite therefore of the superfluous, which we often attach to this word. The intimate link between the ornament and the rite also takes on its full meaning with regard to the etymology of the word rite, which refers the analysis back to the order of the *cosmos*, the order of relations between gods and men, and the order of men and women among themselves. We can therefore see that rite and ornament share the same relationship to order. Heuristically, we could even venture to say that ornament is to space what rite is to human behaviour: an order, more or less repetitive, symbolic and codified, establishing the relationship to the other. Rite and ornament also share semantic similarities with the term “ceremony” or “feast”, and also with “cult”; the latter term comes from the Latin cultus, which also refers to the idea of adorning or decorating and honouring. To worship an image of the Virgin, for example, implies creating a prepared place and adorning it: covering it with an ornament of metal or fabric, flowers, and creating a setting or place that will allow for the veneration thereof.

The ornament necessary for worship is accompanied by a plastic or visual reflection on the relationship between the profane and the sacred. The profane is in the etymological sense what is in front of the sacred (*pro-fanum*). This fundamental threshold never ceases to move through time, space and its own rituals. Objects, accompanied by gestures and words, can trace and establish this boundary. This often involves working on margins, frames and thresholds that literally stage the sacred. On this point, the importance of textiles in the revelation of the sacred

should be noted, as shown by several objects in this exhibition: while adorning and honouring, these textiles materialise by their power, covering the gap between the human and the divine; by their unveiling, they take part in a visual theophany. The indication or establishment of the sacred can also take the form of successive interlocking, which according to a metonymic process, constructs receptacles of the sacred. One thing is certain: the treatment of these objects is supposed to move them into the sphere of the *extra*ordinary, and above all it is intended to distinguish them from objects of ordinary and everyday use.

The ornamental also allows for two dimensions to be articulated, that of the object and that of the image. This division is characteristic of museums, which distinguish between works of art that create images (mainly painting and sculpture) and the so-called decorative arts, which fulfil a function that is not exclusively artistic. Many of the objects exhibited here do not bear any image; others do. Above all these objects remind us that every image is first and foremost an object, and that many objects were images. In addition, some of these object-images or image-objects could be likened to bodies when, for example, they enclosed relics, even taking on their form (a reliquary bust, for example). It is therefore a new relationship that the pieces brought together here examine: the relationship between object and subject. Many of these objects can be assimilated, in the eyes of believers, to agents endowed with an incarnate presence.

The articulation between image and object is coupled with a dialectic between image and ornament, two modes that have long been considered as opposites within the regimes of the figurative. While the iconographic method is interested, or rather has long been interested, in the content of the piece, in its meaning, the study of ornament as a pure interplay of forms has long been compartmentalised in a strictly stylistic approach. The objects gathered here, however, show us that the meaning of the pieces is not exhausted in the decoding of their iconography. Ornament, even stylised or abstract, can signify, in which case it functions as a symbol - which is shown at will by the African or Kanak objects exhibited here, whose ornamental motifs refer to myths and beliefs. Meaning can also shift with the efficiency of the form. This is the case with the voluble ramifications of arabesques, the endless succession of plant lines, a decoration which is *a priori* gratuitous but which visually evokes, in a Christian context, variety, abundance, growth, the wonders of Creation or of the heavenly paradise - ornamental vitalism precisely translating the profusion of the world created by God. The meaning of these objects should therefore be understood somewhere between the form and the symbol.

The art of the rite and the rite of art also engages the relationship between the large and the small. The idea of cosmos indeed refers us to the idea of macrocosm and microcosm. The games of scale, whether in terms of enlargement or miniaturisation, contribute to the value and even the aura attributed to the objects in the rite. If we focus on the microcosm,

the expression “God is in the details” takes on its full meaning here: the miniaturised world refers to the idea of receptacles of the sacred where marvellous craftwork rivals the miraculous.

By acting on our ordinary perception, these games of scale bring in the question of the right distance to adopt towards the objects. Oversized objects, thus magnified, encourage the observer to move away. Conversely, miniaturisation creates an effect of proximity - we are invited to get as close as possible to the details - but at the same time it distances those who cannot master its abundant richness: it literally loses it in the details of this microcosm, which in the end is no more controllable than the macrocosm. We might therefore say that these games of scale at the same time bring together and distance, they connect and separate.

From contemplation at a distance to the most intimate handling of the body, everything is ultimately only a matter of the right distance, which the rite precisely governs by calling for contact, or on the contrary, distance. Whatever the effects of proximity and distance, these objects are supposed to create or participate in an experience that is not only visual: it is often synesthetic and kinaesthetic, i.e. it invokes several different senses and requires bodily movement. This experience is not only external, however. Many of these ritualised objects act at the intersection of interiority and exteriority. They open up a whole imaginary space, that of an invisible world, at once the most intimate and the most distant, two extremes which nevertheless come together to constitute the space where the divine dwells. We might say that they engage in a movement that is both introspective and projective. It is indeed through the relationship between the material and the spiritual that we should understand the operational power of these objects, which can be understood as divine mediators or connectors: through their sensorial qualities, they open up to the invisible. On an axis that is no longer vertical but rather horizontal, this is reflected in the relationship between two spheres that tend to be opposed: the private and the public, two spaces that the rite once again articulates, generating an experience that can be both intimate and communal at the same time.

Power, efficiency, agentivity, performativity, power, all these terms have been on the rise on the scientific scene in recent decades when it comes to considering the functions of images and objects in the ritual context for which they were created and in which they were used. All these terms testify, in one way or another, to the capacity of these objects to act, to activate and to make people act within a network of human relations, relations with the divine or with the environment. And yet this brief journey will no doubt also suffice to show that the power of these ritual objects is also that of inviting us to rethink the major categories through which art history was formed, a discipline forged by its own rituals, whether classifying, theoretical or hermeneutic. **RD and CH**

Theological variations based on Christian ritual objects

In this theological contribution to the reflection on religious ritual objects, we are going to take a deeper look at how and in what way a banal or specific object becomes the mediation of a relationship between the human being and that which lies beyond. The limitation to Christianity is here justified by the profusion of Christian ritual objects in the collections of Musée L and the evolutionary coherence of a specific thought among religions. We will follow the five major turning points of an evolving Christian interpretation.

From *mysterion* to *sacramentum*: the rite understood as a sacred pact
Let us start with the very beginning of Christian theology, to evoke a first dimension that affects ritual objects. Originally, the term *mysterion* (mystery in Greek) was used to refer to the unveiling of God's benevolent plan for humanity, which was hidden beforehand. Entry into this Mystery is linked neither to the activity of an equivalent of the priest in the mystery religions (*Mythras, Eleusis*), nor to that of a master thinker: it is a gift of God's grace. The vocabulary of "mystery" is therefore not applied to rites, but to Christ.

Tertullian, the theologian and jurist (2nd-3rd centuries), developed the *sacramentum* (the usual Latin translation of *mysterion*) by integrating notions borrowed from Roman law. "What is essential", as the great Latinist Christine Mohrmann has clearly shown, "[is] the sacred element combined with a legal sense". The history of Latin Christian rites and thus of ritual objects has always been marked by later rules and regulations. For example, Tertullian characterises baptism as a pact. A "legal" order is somehow required. In Christianity we should think of the order transmitted in the ecclesiastical tradition, ensuring the authenticity of the liturgy and also its ritual performativity. This is a notable peculiarity in comparison to Eastern Christian rites and the rites of other religions.

From the signifier to the signified, from the material to the immaterial
Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was one of the greatest ancient philosophers and theologians. He applied original and innovative thinking in many fields, including rites. With the help of the philosophical ideas of his time, he distinguished between the visible and the invisible, between the signifier and the signified. The exterior in the Augustinian concept is the liturgical celebration, rites and ritual objects. This serves to manifest,

among other things, the relationship between God and people in all its dimensions, especially the love of people for God. To this day, the categories of signifier and signified are still used.

Let us add the binomial material/immaterial as the two faces of the real to which the religious human being aspires. The material ritual object does not arise out of nothing. If it can "function", this is because it has its place in a culture, in a symbolic order, in an environment where the subject comes and becomes a subject. For each human being, there is an already constructed real that precedes it: a material real and an immaterial sense that interprets it. According to Augustine, this material reality (the object) is a clue to the Creator God in the world, but it is not strictly speaking sacred. What is important is its implementation in a celebration, which is the place where the mediation between God and humanity is expressed.

From finality to causality

In the Middle Ages, the advent of cathedral schools and then universities gave rise to a need to clarify the categories of Augustine and other ancient theologians and philosophers. The great question was first of all the purpose of rites. What was the point of all this? Once it was answered that rites serve the salvation of the human being (liberation from eternal death) and everything that contributes to salvation, this made it possible to classify and prioritise them. Then another question arose: causality. How does it work? Theologian Peter Lombard overcomes the signifier/signified polarisation and explains how a sacrament is a sign of God's grace in that "it bears the image and is the cause of it".

The ritual object used in the sacraments is then considered as an instrument with its own function. It is no longer just a participant in a celebration understood as mediation. We therefore pay even greater attention to objects. Some current theologians speak of the birth of a "sacred materialism" or an excess of "reification of the sacred". This explains, in particular, why nothing can be too beautiful or too precious for ritual objects. Over the centuries, this insistence on the ritual and its objects explains why the recipient has sometimes been underestimated, be it the individual or the community.

From intimacy to interpretation, and vice versa

The end of the twentieth century saw the triumph of the self and the individual in the West. Secularisation contributed to this religious individualism, which directly affected Christian rites and the very meaning that ritual objects had in society. Personal religious experience has become central. What exactly are we talking about here? Two dimensions shape religious experience: the intimate and the incommunicable, which are specific to each person, and interpretation, a collective dimension which both precedes people and enables them to account for what they have experienced. André Godin, a pioneer in religious psychology, characterised this by contrasting passive religious experience with active Christian experience. He thus opposed an "experience-emotion-felt" to an "active-experience-synthesis".

Ritual objects hold a decisive place in the dimension of interpretation. Their belonging to a language and a culture and their relative inappropriateness is stressed when we radically change environments. In any case, it is no longer the efficiency of the object or its performativity that is underlined in contemporary research, but rather the putting into language of something that has gone before. It should be noted, however, that the object is capable of touching the intimate by itself, thanks to its aesthetic components.

However, the interpretation is not a unilateral movement of a personal experience lived. It would be caricatural to think that an intimate experience precedes its rereading in a community of faith, as if one were absolutely devoid of any element of religious culture(s). Before the intimate experience of faith, some theologians speak of a rumour. This rare notion in theology is useful in trying to understand the role of ritual objects. Today, religious interpretation increasingly precedes the intimate experience of faith, whether through spiritual, poetic or literary texts, multiple works of art, and even rites and ritual objects encountered, even though we do not grasp their proper meaning. Ritual objects exhibited in museums can thus contribute to a rumour, a little inaudible inner music that will resonate elsewhere another day. It would therefore be wrong to claim that a ritual object is "dead" or totally "deactivated" in a museum.

From the key to the paschal mystery to the keys of the *Art & Rite* exhibition

One of the most fertile theological ideas of the twentieth century was the "theology of mysteries" (*Mysterientheologie*), which decisively influenced Christian ritual renewal. One of the field's major thinkers was Odo Casel (1886-1946). He re-evaluated the category of the sign through a rereading of ancient theology. Christian rites in their entirety are first and foremost signs (signifiers). What is signified is in principle the paschal mystery in its fulness, i.e. the passion, death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus Christ. These signs not only recall the facts of the past, but they "re-present" (make present again) the effects arising from these facts of the history of salvation. In other words, for Christians, the salvific action of Christ is made present to those who celebrate these rites. Ritual objects now enjoy only relative importance in the celebrations in which they are used. Moreover, the current Catholic liturgy no longer provides for a ritual of the "consecration" of objects, but only for "blessings".

According to this perspective, a ritual object in a museum no longer works since it is not used in a celebration. And yet, is it really that simple? We can undoubtedly attribute several more effects to the object, which are essential in this exhibition. The ritual object exhibited can evoke past rites and thus nourish visitors' knowledge. On its own or by echoing other objects from the same ritual family or from other religions, it may provoke personal reflection. Its beauty or originality will hopefully provoke an emotion that will broaden the awareness of young and old alike. **AJL**

Walking around the exhibition

The *Art & Rite* exhibition brings together ritual objects that have, at some point in their history, been diverted from their primary purpose - to serve a rite - in order to join the collection of Musée L or other private or museum collections, as far as objects on loan are concerned. This change in status raises many questions, starting, once again, with a shift in meaning, which reduces the ritual object actioned to the mere representation of itself or part of a rite. As an immediate consequence, the multidimensional ritual action is restricted to a two-dimensional destiny: exhibition - contemplation. How can the richness of the objects' ritual dimension be returned to them when chosen for this exhibition? Or how can we ritualise the Musée L? The ideal exhibition would undoubtedly simply place these objects, each laden with its own history and the accumulation of ritual experiences, in such a way that the visitor may take possession of them and enter into a ritual space-time, either individually or collectively, established at the very moment of the visit. The vision of heritage preservation and conservation commonly accepted in the West, just as much as that of objects collected, does not allow for such a realization, as it would seem too daring, even iconoclastic.

By choosing a diversity of objects, a diversity of cultural and cult origins, a diversity of disciplinary points of view, this exhibition tends, to a certain extent, to reconcile the irreconcilable. Yet this is of little importance since it is above all a question of offering a sensorial experience, conditions, a ritual atmosphere, so that "something" might happen for the visitor. Some objects seem to speak for themselves as they enter the known sphere of ritual logic common to our western societies, especially objects belonging to Christian rites. Make no mistake about it. Each object refers to a particular sensorial experience stemming from its individual, family and social history. **AMV**

Ritual objects or works of art?

The museum collects, preserves and protects objects that come into its collection, uprooted from their original setting, in a way anaesthetised, emptied of part of their actual meaning.

One of the museum's fundamental missions is therefore to *put these objects back into their original context*, to recall their uses by endeavouring to make people understand their performativity and the identity roles they played in their culture. By means of labelling, iconographic and sound documentation, staging and commentary, the museum aims to make people understand the depth of experience that is not always revealed by simply observing the objects from the outside, especially when they belong to geographically distant civilisations or ancient times which the viewer is not familiar with.

In terms of instituted rites, the museum reminds us who handled the objects by virtue of shared beliefs. It sheds light on the dynamic role of ritual props and their expected effectiveness. It makes us understand the mediating action they exerted within the community (a chalice veil, for example, is a marker of the threshold of sacrality that separates the faithful from the celebrant, who alone has the right to touch the liturgical object) and the ordering purpose they served within the social body (a book of hours, for example, suggests a prayer calendar that sets the rhythm of collective temporality, including certain local particularities such as specific feasts). They underline the power of objects to reinforce individuals in their collective belonging, in other words their specific participation in the integrating virtue of the rites (such is the effect of the Kuba masks used in ritual dances, and the statue of the duplicate Buddha which represents the non-hierarchical link between master and pupil on the spiritual level). Among the pragmatic aspects of the ritualised use of objects, the museum's guide sheet sheds light on the reassuring effect, for it is generally considered that a rite's

primary effect is anxiolytic: it allows one to deal in the imagination with what proves problematic in reality, hoping for a return effect[1] (the Kanak people call for rain with a ritual axe that symbolically strikes the sun). This is the museum's pedagogical and instructive aspect, its educational vocation.

Many of the objects that were initially part of the sphere of worship are today mere cultural objects in shopping galleries and museums. The vagaries of history have favoured this conversion: the spoils of war, shelter in times of violence, the secularisation of instruments of worship banned from churches and forced to become museum pieces after the French Revolution, and appropriations during the period of colonisation are some of the circumstances that led to the massive presence of religious accessories in spaces devoted to art in the West. The state of abandonment of places that had fallen into ruins and were open to looting, and the fluctuation of aesthetic tastes also led to the commodification of many ritual attributes as objects of art. The historicising approach to these objects becomes all the more necessary to understand them when the situations they came from become *terra incognita* for later generations.

And yet the appreciation to be given to these objects can also, legitimately, be of an *aesthetic* nature, as it would be unfair to limit their understanding to their use. The criteria for the appreciation of beauty are, however, as we know, eminently cultural and not universal: they vary according to place and time. This imposes on the museum the task of educating the viewer's gaze by contextualising the objects in relation to the *history of art*, which determines the evolution of taste in terms of aesthetics, but also independently of the period and the original use of the object: the public should be led to observe what escapes the eye that is not only uninformed, but also untrained, in order to avoid the trap of a hasty reading that would reduce the object to being "representative" of a time, a place or an action. It is therefore a question of

[1] "A rite is essentially a ritual imitation that brings about a real effect. This is the very essence of the definition of the rite", Jean Daniélou, *La signification des rites* (Méloans-Revel: Déslris, 1993), p. 17.

drawing attention to an object's formal characteristics: the choice of materials, the outline and mass, the beauty of manufacture, the particularity of a technical process, the workmanship, the remarkable nature of a detail, etc. These elements can be the anchor of an emotional approach to the objects, which the museum endeavours to promote through special presentation devices.

The museum thus invites visitors to look at objects in a way that is not just informative and analytical: a sensorial approach that should allow visitors to experience the pleasure of discovery that went into their manufacture or handling, and to accompany their contemplation. Etymologically, the word "museum" is the Latin word adopted into our language; the Latin word comes from the Greek meaning "place consecrated to the Muses", i.e. a place devoted to the conservation and study of artistic objects and practices. The museum is a "temple of art", as the pictogram generally associated with it makes clear. Are the ritual objects in museum collections works of art? At the very least, they are objects that can be removed from ordinary use in order to come to life in the space-time separated from the rite; this particularity predisposes them to integration into the sphere of art, which, apart from the specific nature of the decorative arts, part of people's everyday life, also lies outside ordinary banality. Ritual and art share the fact that they enhance the experience, taking it to a higher level of intensity.

One of the peculiarities of ritual functioning complicates the museum's role in this regard, namely the fact that any object can be integrated into a ritual practice. It is therefore conceivable that not all ritual accessories are necessarily objects with conspicuous plastic qualities. The role of the museum is then to encourage the viewer's willingness to understand the object in the emotional framework of its ritualised use. Painted or filmed scenes and testimonials can revive the emotional charge that the object once bore, and resurrect its potential for wonder in the viewer's mind.

It is therefore in two different but complementary ways that the museum restores the life of the objects entrusted to it: through information and through emotion, by activating rationality on the one hand, and keen observation and imagination on the other. The museum provides knowledge, informs about know-how, and at the same time stimulates sensorial and emotional experiences that open up the possibility of a meaningful and appealing understanding of the world. **MWD**

Vajradhara

© Photo : Michel Wuyts - MAS

Vajradhara
Tibet-Chine, Période Xuande (1426-1435)
Alliage de cuivre doré
28 x 17,5 x 11,5 cm
Anvers, Museum aan de Stroom
N° inv. AE.2002.0030

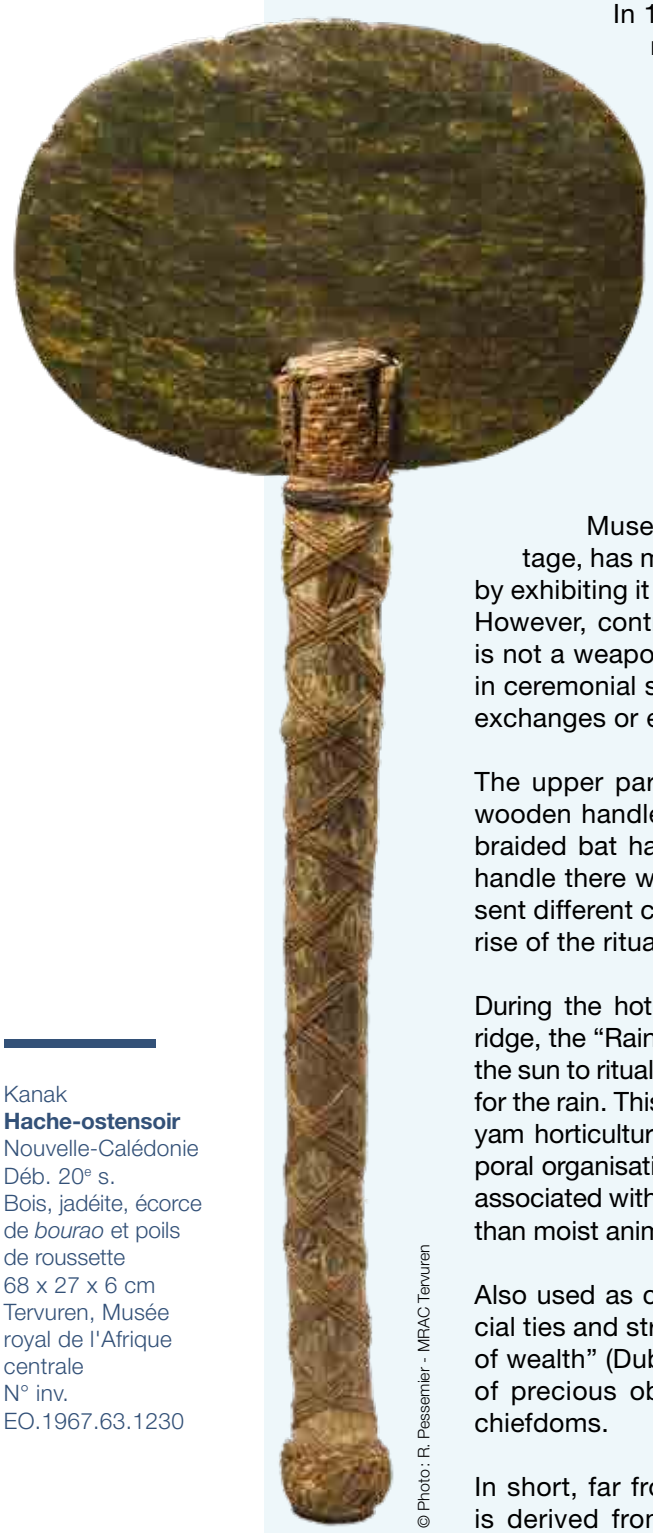
This magnificent piece is a gilded bronze from the fifteenth century, probably of Newari (Nepalese) or Tibetan workmanship, as the Newars of the Kathmandu valley have been renowned craftsmen for many centuries, producing sculptures for Tibetan temples. It is a representation of the Vajradhara Buddha (Tibetan *rDo rje 'chang*), the Adibuddha or "primordial Buddha" of the New Tibetan Schools (kagyüpa, sakyapa, gelougpa). The primordial Buddha is not an external god. Indeed, the two figures together symbolise the inseparable union of emptiness and clarity, that is to say a representation of the Buddhahood present in each being, while at the same time they are the figuration of the Buddha-source of all the tantric lineages of these schools in its unified masculine and feminine principles. This is not a contradiction, for the very principle

of Buddhahood lies at the root of all successive masters and constitutes what the masters reveal to their disciples during initiation: it is the true nature of their pure and perfect mind when the latter is finally freed from the veils of ignorance and the passions that obscure it. In other words, what is represented here is the Absolute Body of the Original Awakening or *dharmakâya* of the lineage of transmission of tantras, a transmission which then passed through all the masters of the past to the present master, and reaches the present disciple. Through the initiation given by the master, the disciple discovers little by little through his own practice that the principle of Awakening has always resided deep down inside himself: thus the primordial Buddha, the initiator of the lineage, through a loop effect, turns out to be very close to the student since he is the very nature of the lineage.

Here, in his statue, the primordial Buddha is made of bronze covered with gold leaf, but in the pictorial representation, Vajradhara, the "holder of the vajra", is deep blue, the colour of the immutable and unfathomable emptiness of the mind in its ultimate nature. This emptiness is not nothingness as one might imagine in the West, but the primordially pure and open dimension of the undeluded mind, the empty matrix of luminosity from which all manifestations of phenomena spontaneously proceed, without any question here of the will of a god creating the universe. This, once again, is our ultimate nature. The fact that Vajradhara represents the absolute nature of the spirit does not prevent him from wearing princely ornaments such as the tiara of five jewels, and precious necklaces and bracelets. These ornaments show that any phenomenon can arise from the energy of emptiness; appearances are only the fleeting and ever-changing ornamentation of this original emptiness. Emptiness manifests itself in phenomena and these phenomena, far from being eternal substances, are of an empty nature, devoid of being in themselves; they are no more than the incessant game or free unfolding of the light energy that springs from emptiness.

Together with his luminosity in a white female form, Vajradhara holds in his hands a vajra or diamond sceptre on the right, representing the tantric methods or skilful means of practice (Sanskrit *upāya*), and a bell (Sanskrit *ghaṇṭā*) in the left hand, representing the wisdom (Sanskrit *prajñā*) born of the realisation of emptiness. The fact that the bell and vajra are crossed over the heart of Vajradhara underlines the importance for the practitioner of Vajrayāna or tantra to always unite wisdom with the various methods of practice he applies, so that they are not just meaningless spiritual tools. Thus, chanting, rituals, visualisations, sacred gestures or *mudrā*, sacred formulas or *mantra* recited are all methods that only make sense when united with wisdom. For it is only on this condition that these methods lead to liberation from suffering and to the full Awakening of the practitioner. They would be, on their own, mere instrumentalisations of the spiritual for the benefit of the individual wishing to master the spiritual powers of the practice, which would be a serious fall from the point of view of the Tantric way – whose sole purpose is to favour the attainment of the Awakening of the practitioner for the good of all beings. **PC**

Monstrance axe



© Photo: R. Pessemier - MRAC Tervuren

Kanak
Hache-ostensoir
Nouvelle-Calédonie
Déb. 20e s.
Bois, jadéite, écorce de *bourao* et poils de roussette
68 x 27 x 6 cm
Tervuren, Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale
N° inv.
EO.1967.63.1230

In 1793, during the expedition of Admiral Bruni d'Entrecasteaux in the South Pacific, the crew nicknamed this object the "monstrance axe" because of its resemblance to the monstrance used in Catholic ritual when displaying the host (see page 98).

In the colonial imagination that was so fond of exoticism, the Kanaks were stereotyped as wicked cannibals who used this "axe" to butcher human corpses, when the truth is that the object had no technical use, given its fragility.

Museography, influenced by its naturalist heritage, has maintained an erroneous vision of the object by exhibiting it all too often under the category of a "club". However, contrary to ethnocentric appearances, the axe is not a weapon or a tool but a symbolic object exhibited in ceremonial speeches, used as a currency in customary exchanges or employed in rituals to make it rain.

The upper part of the "axe" is made of jade, while the wooden handle is coated with bourao bark covered with braided bat hairs (from the fruit bat). At the base of the handle there were originally certain rare shells that represent different clans, and whose number contributes to the rise of the ritualiser's power.

During the hot season, standing at dawn on a mountain ridge, the "Rain Masters" would brandish the axe in front of the sun to ritually strike it and eclipse it in order to make way for the rain. This was essential for the smooth running of the yam horticultural cycle that structures the social and temporal organisation of Kanak society. Collective taboos were associated with this ritual, such as not eating any food other than moist animal or vegetable foods (eels, taros, etc.).

Also used as coins, axes were employed to maintain social ties and strengthen clan alliances by following a "path of wealth" (Dubois, 1978) characterised by the circulation of precious objects in a network of exchanges among chiefdoms.

In short, far from being a club, the power of this object is derived from the symbolic activities of the "existing

© Photos : Quai Branly

Kanak
Pierre à magie pour la pluie
Nouvelle-Calédonie, Houaïlou
Milieu 19e s. - déb. 20e s.
Lithique (concrétion de magnésie)
15 x 10,5 x 5 cm
Paris, Musée du Quai Branly
N° inv. 71.1930.30.23

Kanak
Paquet magique pour la pluie
Nouvelle-Calédonie, Houaïlou
Déb. 20e s.
Écorce, cordelettes de fibres de cocotier, cordonnet de poils de roussette, pierre, roseau, filet et feuilles séchées
33 x 8,5 x 4,7 cm
Paris, Musée du Quai Branly
N° inv. 71.1934.2.43.1-2

things" (Descola, 2005) that compose it (fruit bat hair, jade, shells, plants) or are associated with it. For example, during the rain ritual, the power of the axe is reinforced by the joint use of the "magic stone" and the "magic bag".

Beyond the scientific prism of the classification of the animal, vegetable and mineral elements linked to the object, if we wish to get closer to the truth concerning the monstrance axe, just like many other objects of "ethnic art" exhibited in our museums, it would be a question of getting rid of a blinding classifying logic in favour of an enlightening associative approach.

One example is the fruit bat (whose hair is one of the components of the axe), which is generally exhibited in the "mammal" category. However, among the Kanak people, the fruit bat is in no way "taxonomised" with other animals with mammary glands, but is shown according to its agentivity, i.e. its action on the world as a relay for "active intentions" (Gell, 2009). The fruit bat thus brings ontological strength to the monstrance axe as a totem, as an indicator of cyclone forecasting and as a central element of the traditional currency made from its bones. Its categorisation as a "mammal" corresponds in fact to a world order specific to Western science, and which makes no sense to the Kanaks.

Similarly, the green jade stone, another component of the monstrance axe, is of great value not only because of its rarity, but above all because it is the result of a very laborious process of carving, wearing and polishing involving a whole ritualised chain of manufacture, known as the "jade cycle" (Leenhardt, 1930). The reduction of the stone by rubbing, generating a "stone song" (Leenhardt, 1930), makes its edges translucent and reveals a large circle of haloed light when the axe is ritually brandished in front of the sun. **CB**

Book of Hours

Crucifixion
Extrait de ***Horae latinae ad usum Rotomagensem*** **(Livre d'Heures à l'usage de Rouen)**
f°28-29
France, 16e s.
Parchemin, 18 x 13 cm
Archives de l'UCLouvain, N° inv. BE A4006 CO 001 MA018

Around 1250, a new type of prayer book saw the light of day, the Book of Hours; it turned out to be an unprecedented success in Europe down to the end of the sixteenth century. True bestsellers combining text and images, Books of Hours were produced in greater numbers than the Bible. These personalised objects allowed their owners to practice their pious exercises, express their social status and experience a certain aesthetic pleasure.

Resulting from previous monastic practices, Books of Hours provided lay men and women with the possibility of routine devotional practice. They contain a set of texts to be recited throughout the day, following the framework of the eight canonical hours (matins, lauds, prime, terce, sext, nones, vespers and compline) and a calendar of the main religious and saints' feast-days. At the heart of the book are the Office of the Virgin and the Office of the Cross, which contain hymns and psalms devoted to the Childhood and Passion of Christ respectively. For the rest, the content varies from one copy to another, adapted to the particular desires and devotions of the commissioners. The texts contained in these books also present variations depending on local liturgies (known as "uses"). Uses are observed in particular in the choice of the saints mentioned in the calendar and make it possible to say where the manuscripts were copied. The textual content of the Book of Hours exhibited here corresponds to the use of Rouen and thus

suggests that the illuminations are the work of a French artist.

The diversity of the Books of Hours is also expressed in the scope and quality of the images and their iconographic programmes. This Book of Hours for the use of Rouen has a “standard” decoration, consisting of eight full-page miniatures, borders with floral decoration and numerous coloured or floral letters. All of these elements can be found in the two folia on display: on the left, the text arranged in two columns – the offices of none (the canonical hour celebrated at around 3 p.m.), the Hours of the Cross and the Hours of the Holy Spirit – is embellished with red, blue and floral initials, defining the different sections of the offices. It is also accompanied by a gilded compartmentalised border decorated with flowers, typical of the production of French and Flemish manuscripts in the early sixteenth century.

Photo Rijksmuseum

Maître d’Alkmaar
Panneau droit d’une épitaphe avec neuf portraits féminins et Marie-Madeleine
Pays-Bas septentrionaux
1515 - 1520
Huile sur panneau
101 × 35,7 cm
Amsterdam
Rijksmuseum
N° inv. SK-A-1188-B

This page of text faces a depiction of the Crucifixion. This is hardly surprising. Indeed, the office of nones commemorates Christ’s death on the cross. The composition of this folium is dense: the crucified Christ is in the centre, flanked on either side by the two thieves, while in the foreground is the weeping Madonna kneeling at the foot of the cross with the holy women and St. John, as well as a horseman looking intensely at Christ. In the background is a vast landscape with a river, a town and plains occupied by troops. The Renaissance style can be recognised in the care given to the landscape, the musculature of the figures and the details of the clothing. The illuminator paid particular attention to the frame highlighting the miniature. Also in the Renaissance style, it is made up of two columns, one of which is twisted and two-coloured, topped by a pediment decorated with garlands and cherubs. The few lines of text at the bottom of the composition correspond to the invitatory that opens the office for matins: “Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. O God, come to my assistance, Lord, come to help me”.

The images in the Books of Hours are often regarded as “painted prayers”. As can be seen here, they are usually located in strategic places such as at the beginning of a new section of text. They are not mere illustrations of the texts, but rather serve to stimulate the devotees’ pious imagination. They echo the texts they accompany by enriching the recitation of prayers. Reading the text and contemplating the images were two complementary activities in the use of these objects inciting prayer, not to mention the aesthetic pleasure that could be derived from observing the miniatures and other decorations in the margins. **IF**

Mask

Bushoong (Kuba)
Masque *Ngady a Muaash*
République démocratique du Congo
20e s.
Bois, pigments, perles, cauris et textiles
32 x 20 x 25 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E1891
Collection Claire et Robert Steichen

According to certain Kuba historical and mythical accounts, the origin of the *Ngaady a Mwaash* mask is related to Queen Ngokady, mother of the ruler Mbwoong a-Lyeeng, who reigned in the seventeenth century.

Ngokady was said to have wished to give women a more important role, particularly through dance. However, as the sovereign herself did not excel in this bodily expression, she asked a good dancer to disguise himself as a woman. Thus was born *Ngaady a Mwaash*, a mask that evokes a female character but is always danced by a man.

Ngokady came to a tragic end. Disavowed for menstruating at a meeting of the assembly of notables, she was buried alive. Later, Mbwoong a-Lyeeng avenged his mother by smashing the skull of the main culprit.

Returning to *Ngaady a Mwaash*, we could say that this female mask was used, in particular, at the time of the funeral of the initiated, in the company of a male mask, such as a *bwoom*. The dance was mainly defined as sensual and extremely fluid in the movement of both the body and the limbs. As the visibility provided by the mask was rather poor or even non-existent, a necklace made of palm fibres could sometimes be seen on the dancer's neck, which an assistant could grasp in order to guide *Ngaady a Mwaash*.

Photo anonyme, droits réservés

Masque féminin dansant (détail) République démocratique du Congo, Mushenge (Kuba), 1909 Archives photographiques du MRAC Tervuren / N° inv. EP.0.0.9434

This female mask is sometimes labelled as an Ngaady a Mwaash, but its plastic aspect is closer to the Mukasha ka muadi from the northern Kete and adopted by several Kuba groups. For researcher D. Binkley, a specialist in the Kuba world, Ngaady a Mwaash can be considered as an adaptation of the Mukasha ka muadi.

Kuba art and crafts could be defined as perfectly illustrating the concept *of horror vacui*. Whether it be *twool* (red pigment) boxes, palm wine bowls or masks, Kuba artefacts are characterised by an abundance of engraved or painted motifs, often with very poetic names such as *lashyaang lantshetsh* (the glory of lightning), *Mbish angil* (the back of the black monkey) and *byoosh'dy* (tears). This last motif affects the shape of parallel lines from the lower eyelid of the *Ngaady a Mwaash*. In Europe Kuba art was appreciated by Europeans from the end of the nineteenth century. At the Brussels-Tervuren exhibition in 1897, the magnificent Kuba textiles, and the "Kasai velvets" in particular, were given pride of place and considered by the critics as capable of competing with the productions of Art Nouveau decorators!

With the reinforcement of Belgian presence in the Congo, many Kuba craftsmen turned to the production of objects derived from traditional examples, intended for this new foreign clientele. They could be pieces made to be sold as "souvenirs of the Congo", or to be used as gifts that the *nyim* (sovereign) or some important notable could give distinguished European visitors.

Among these export objects were masks... which after being bought by a colonist who appreciated their colourful designs, sometimes even ended up in museums.

As a little anecdote, we came across one of these tourist type Kuba masks owned by a Belgian family who had a sentimental attachment to it. Far from ethnographic collections, it had been won by the grandmother as a prize at a "transvestite ball" held in 1927 in Ilebo. Although no Kuba rite had brought this mask to life, it nevertheless took part in a very particular "European rite", during which a governor dressed as a detective and a district commissioner dressed in Mandarin style were seen, among others, competing to win it. **JV**

Chalice veil

© Photo : Mireille Gilbert

Atelier DORMAL-PONCE
Voile de calice avec colombe
Belgique, Ath
Vers 1730-1740
Soie, fil d'or et d'argent
54 x 55 cm
Trésor de Liège
N° inv. F123
Ancienne abbaye bénédictine Saint-Jacques à Liège

Coming up against the precious square of fabric, entirely embroidered with gold, silver and silk threads, you could almost forget its ritual purpose. However, although the chalice veil is no longer used today in Catholic liturgy, it was an essential element in the "Eucharistic moment" from the sixteenth century. As the mass is conceived as a commemoration of the Last Supper and Christ's sacrifice, the Eucharist is the culmination of the mass, the moment when the bread and wine are transformed into the true body and blood of Christ, according to the dogma of transubstantiation. As its name suggests, the chalice veil was used to cover the chalice during the first part of the mass, until it was uncovered to pour in the mixture of wine and water contained in the cruets. But what exactly is the meaning of this cover?

To cover with cloth means first of all to protect. With the paten (the dish used to place the host on) and the ciborium (the cup containing the consecrated hosts), the chalice is indeed in direct contact with holy material. The chalice, ciborium and paten are therefore endowed with a sacrality conferred on them by the consecration. This sacrality places them at the top of the hierarchy of liturgical objects, it imposes the use of precious materials and well-defined handling (only the clerics and the sacristan may touch these consecrated vessels) and it implies their association with various textiles intended to protect their contents from defilement and profanation. In this plate opposite, where the uncovering of the chalice is related to the stripping of Christ's garments before his flagellation, we see

the chalice surmounted by the cloth (a cardboard square covered with linen to prevent any impurities from falling into it) and placed on another linen textile, the corporal (linen stretched out by the celebrant at the offertory in order to place the sacred vessels on it and to collect any sacred crumbs or drops that may have fallen out); the corporal itself is kept in a cloth purse to protect it. Given that textiles have the capacity to be impregnated with the virtues and smells of beings or things, they convey this memory. These fabrics located closest to the sacred items are associated with other textile pieces decorating the altar or covering the bodies of prelates, and with which they often form a set of the same workmanship and colour, as is the case of this chalice veil, part of a richly embroidered golden set, the matching dalmatics of which are presented later (see p. 91). Together with the other objects of worship, these textiles act as visual markers of the thresholds of sacrality: access to the "choir" in a church is only possible from outside the building through a succession of doors, barriers, frames, veils and other hurdles, of which the chalice veil is only one link in a chain that takes part in the staging of the invisible mystery of the real presence.

Photo : gallica.bnf.fr

Le prêtre découvrant le calice
Gravure de Jean COLIN, extraite de : *Le tableau de la croix represente dans les ceremonies de la S.te messe* (…), Paris, Mazot, 1652, p. 12
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département Arsenal, N° inv. Réserve 8-NF-4017

Covering also means insisting, in the manner of a deictic, on the thing covered, to make it seen and stand out in a sensitive way. Here it implies giving the blood of Christ a sensitive thickness, which could be translated into a wonder – on a material, formal or iconographic level – by this chalice veil dating from the 1730s, recently identified as the production of the Dormal-Ponce embroiderers' workshop in Ath. The veil was used in the Benedictine liturgy in the abbey church of Saint-Jacques in Liège. Covering the entire fabric, the embroidery composed of gold and silver threads – more precisely of yarns, i.e. metal blades spirally wound around a silk core – confers a singular rigidity onto the fabric, the support of which had to be further reinforced by the cloth underneath, endowing the whole with a material and visual thickness. The metallic threads, enriched by highlights of coloured silk, are worked in guipures and couchure, i.e. laid on the fabric and attached by silk fastening points, whose varied arrangement (staggered, herringbone or other) confers subtle and nuanced textural effects. The result is a delicacy and singular radiance, a particular liveliness and vitality, a vitality that is still reflected in the undulating floral motifs sprouting from horns of plenty and acanthus scrolls. The dove, with its outstretched wings emerging from its radiant glory, is also a clear allusion to the Eucharistic function of the object, in addition to its Baroque opulence. Formally and symbolically materialising the glory of Christ at a time when pomp was a full part of the effectiveness of the ritual, this chalice veil shows us that its aesthetic part cannot be disassociated from its ritual and symbolic identity. **CH**

Ritual manufacture

By being making an object act and putting it into action, the manufacture of ritual objects is part of the preparation of a rite, or even a ritual action in itself. How is this so? Starting with a few exemplary objects, this section presents the result of know-how as a means of entering into a ritual context: nailing, knotting, rolling, gluing, bending, stretching, burning, drawing... Moreover, the artisanal and skilful assemblages that lead to the production of these objects are the architecture of the invisible. Literally, they make present – through materials, colours, smells, textures – other dimensions of daily life where transcendence takes shape for a limited time, or in the longer term when the object is preserved. In other words, it is a question of opening up a ritual space-time through the manufacture of objects initially conceived as supports for prayer, meditation, awareness or putting the world in order. This space-time is re-opened each time the rite takes place, reactivating the manufactured objects which then lead a life of their own, charged with the gestures and intentions that have been placed in them.

The manufacture of certain objects unfolds through a real “thickness” of gestures and ritual actions accumulated over time. This is what the statue of a nail dog, a *nkisi nkonde* or talisman (also known as a power statue) named *Semba* from the Yombe culture (a Kongo group). Used in divinatory practices and to punish criminals and sorcerers, the *nkisi nkonde* strike their victims with serious illnesses and may also have

Yombe
Statue à clous animalière
République démocratique du Congo
Vers 1900
Bois, fibre végétale, fer, textile et verre
21 x 20 x 66 cm
Tervuren, Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale
N° inv. EO.0.0.22450

prophylactic and curative properties. The shape of the dog is not insignificant: capable of protecting as well as attacking, the dog is effective in tracking its prey and its sense of smell symbolises the lucidity and clairvoyance of the diviner. All the stages in the making of these statues are ritualised, from the choice of cutting down the tree, accompanied by offerings, to the moment when the statue was loaded with ingredients (a mixture of plant, animal and mineral materials), which, nested in the statue, constitute its strength. The accumulation of metal blades and spikes bear witness to the ritual use of the statue: during each request (vengeance, vows, etc.) a metal element is driven into the body of the statue, which allows its forces to be released, directed or controlled. The statue we see is the result of an accumulation of ritual gestures and intentions: its final appearance is not limited to the size of the object by the sculptor, whose workshop is located in the forest, far from the community, but also includes the long time of its ritual use.

If the manufacture of *nkisi nkonde* takes place out of sight, the same applies, in the context of the Western Christian world, to many objects made in the context of voluntary confinement; nuns in contemplative convents. Embroidery, lace, artificial flowers, wax casts, paintings, *paperolle* reliquaries, rosaries, etc. are all manual work carried out by nuns. Musée L preserves many such testimonies. By opening the sewing and handicraft boxes of the Recollectine sisters in Assesse (in the province of Namur), we discover the intimate personal universe of these nuns. Inhabited by pious images carefully glued and coloured, these boxes reveal the devotional and spiritual identity of the nuns' manual work.

Boite d'outils de religieuse
Belgique, Couvent d'Assesse, 20e s.
Bois, matériel de couture et images de dévotion
21,5 x 15 x 7,5 cm
Bastogne, Piconrue – Musée de la Grande Ardenne,
N° inv. B20161119009

Voile de calice des Ursulines
Pays-Bas, 17e s.
Dentelle de fils or et argent sur fond de velours
53 x 54 cm
Trésor de Liège
N° inv. 150
Couvent des Ursulines de Mons

© Photo : Alexandre Alvarez

The chalice veil from the Ursuline convent of Mons is a beautiful testimony to the intensive and almost superhuman labour of these women's needlework. Made with repeated, meticulous, jerky or rhythmic gestures, this type of work – here a needle lace of metallic threads on a red velvet fabric – resembles a genuine ritual, especially when accompanied by prayers, when they were not themselves conceived and experienced as manual prayers. In fact, the handcraft exercise involves an almost automatic operation of the hands, creating a flow of extreme concentration. This operation is conducive to exercises of meditative introspection, even more so when accompanied by songs and tones, sounds which can be understood as the rhythmic translations of manual work, and which by serving as mnemonic means, facilitate the

completion of the work. A *topos* deeply rooted in Western culture is the association between needlework and virtue. Just like the Virgin Mary, part of whose daily tasks consists of different kinds of needlework, the nuns, spiritual wives of Christ, keep sinners away and cultivate their virtues through manual labour, an expression of the contemplative union with God sought by these nuns.

But it is undoubtedly through the teeming world of reliquaries that this contemplative ideal of manual labour is best expressed. Born of the "enclosed garden" tradition that spread through convents in the fifteenth century, these reliquaries are made from thin strips of paper, rolled up and curled, gilded on the edge, forming voluble and luxuriant motifs that frame, decorate and (thus) enhance fragments of relics, and also pious images or waxen *Agnus dei*. The making of these objects is governed by a logic of handicraft and reuse, cumulative and combinatory. But what is the meaning we should give to the making of these objects? Are they a symbol of paradise? A place conducive to the mys-

Tableau-reliquaire à paperolles de sainte Catherine (détail)
France (?), 1745 -1765
Papier, os, soie et dorure
31 x 37 x 6 cm
Musée L, N° inv. BO410
Donation Boyadjian

tical union with God encouraged by the spiritual practices inherited from the late Middle Ages? A personal sanctuary or a prayer room that awakens the senses? Or again, from a psychological point of view, are they the crystallisation of the libidinal displacement of nuns who have rejected the world? Whatever the significance attributed to the making of these reliquaries, the objects nonetheless remain the bearers of a powerful emotional charge, a pious and loving intension materialised in elaborate convolutions that contrast violently with the austerity of the convent. And whether these objects were kept in convents or in the houses of private individuals to whom they were offered or by whom they were commissioned, the charge is reactivated in the context of

Moines bouddhistes réalisant un mandala avec du sable
Ladakh, Monastère de Diskit dans la vallée de la Nubra, 2011

Photo: Istock by Getty Image

personal religious practices. These reliquaries functioned both as oratories or sanctuaries, and as curiosity cabinets, somewhere between altarpieces and household objects.

Through its spiritual, not to say initiatory, nature, and the ornamental approach that underlies it, the making of these reliquaries finds an echo, within the Buddhist world, in that of mandalas, the ephemeral figures made of coloured sand powder, ritually produced by monks to transmit power. They are destroyed or rather dissolved after initiation, while the coloured powder is recovered in an urn before being scattered over the waters of a river or a lake. Usually, the best-known representations in the contemporary West are Tibetan, forming part of the Western imagination of Buddhism reduced to its simplest expression or misinterpretation. In an extremely simplified manner, within Vajrayana, the third vehicle of Buddhism, the "diamond vehicle", and even Tantrism, a certain number of practices allow one to reach Enlightenment in a few lives, sometimes in only one (the aim of the practitioner is to escape from the cycle of reincarnation). The only person authorised to permit the practice of tantra, a master guides a disciple by initiating him, and by transmitting the "power" to him. The realisation of a mandala forms part of this initiation. Indeed, in Vajrayana, sadhana is the method by which the practitioner progresses towards the realisation of Enlightenment through different types of ritual means: visualisation, mandala, puja (offerings), mantra (a sacred formula), mudra (symbolic gesture), awakened activities (appeasement, growth, control, subjugation). What do Tibetan mandalas represent? A square palace with four doors, oriented according to the cardinal points, encircled by diamonds (vajra) and flames; a palace inside which the deities or the various figures of the Buddha will be received – that is to say, represented.

It is also about the environment with the Inuit drum (see below). A drum links the body, the house and the cosmos in a holistic vision of the world where each element interacts with the other. Good drum making is essential for harmonious communication-communion among humans, their habitat and the environment around them. The person who possesses the knowledge of the drum therefore plays a key role in the community.

As for the mask effigy of New Ireland, it is made, activated and destroyed during the ritual funeral ceremony of the *malanggan*. The latter involves a chain of numerous rituals, such as the construction of a "*funeral parade chair*" for the corpse, the preparation of ceremonial vegetable gardens for fertility rituals, the exchange of food and shell coins, the secret manufacture of the mask to be animated by song and dance, and its destruction by fire or decay. The longest phase of the *malanggan* is devoted to the making of the mask, involving multiple sub-rituals such as the preparation of the design and ceremonial sites, the search in the forest for the materials required to make it, the different stages of sculpting and the scenography of activation with the relics of the

Masque de cérémonie funéraire *Malanggan*
Nouvelle-Irlande
Déb. 20e (?)
Bois, coquillage et fibre végétale
52 x 24 x 24 cm
Tervuren, Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale
N° inv. EO.1979.1.1367

© Photo : J.-M. Vandyck - MRAC Tervuren

Kanak
Hache-ostensoir
Nouvelle-Calédonie, 19e s.
Bois, jadéite, fibre végétale et poils de roussette
52 x 17 x 12 cm
Tervuren, Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale
N° inv. EO.1979.1.1453

deceased. Contrary to a logic of conservation, the *malanggan* ceremony of temporary regeneration of the deceased involved the destruction of the object in order to show that death is not an end but a rebirth. Beyond the celebration of the dead, taking part in the preparation of the *malanggan* ceremony was a means for members of the clan of the deceased to initiate or reaffirm their prestige.

The same is true of the Kanak monstrance axe, whose creation, far from being limited to this single object, involves a long chain of operations and a whole system of objects, elements, gestures, space and time (see page 32). **CB, CH and AMV**

The drum *(qilaut)*

Inuit
Tambour *qilaut*
Amérique du Nord, 2013
Bois, tissu gabardine imperméable
Tambour : 48 cm (diamètre : 37 cm), mailloche : 25,5 cm
Collection privée
AM Vuillemenot

Even if shamans might use a drum during certain rituals, it is not strictly a shamanic object. It is used during various festivals in the Inuit calendar. Rasmussen explains its constitution: “The skin, (which is) stretched over a wooden frame, sometimes round, sometimes oval, is made from the skin of a female caribou or a young male caribou, but without its hair”. He adds, “This is known as *ija* ·, the “eye” of the drum, and it should be moistened with water and stretched well before use. Only in this way will it produce the true mysterious sound of rumbling and thunder”. (Rasmussen, 1929: 230)

Beyond the sound, it is therefore the visual code that is especially underlined. Rasmussen points out that for the Iglulingmiut, the harmonisation (or adjustment) of the drum was essential before any performance. This instrument, which the Inuit say belongs to no-one, serves as a true revealer of visions and a tool for communication with non-humans, connecting the player and his body to the forces of the cosmos and his ancestors. The drum connects several different cosmological levels. The etymology of the term, *qilak* (the heavens), refers both to the roof of the house and the palate in the mouth, thus connecting the human body to the house and the cosmos.

Nowadays, drums are no longer made from skins but from synthetic fabric.

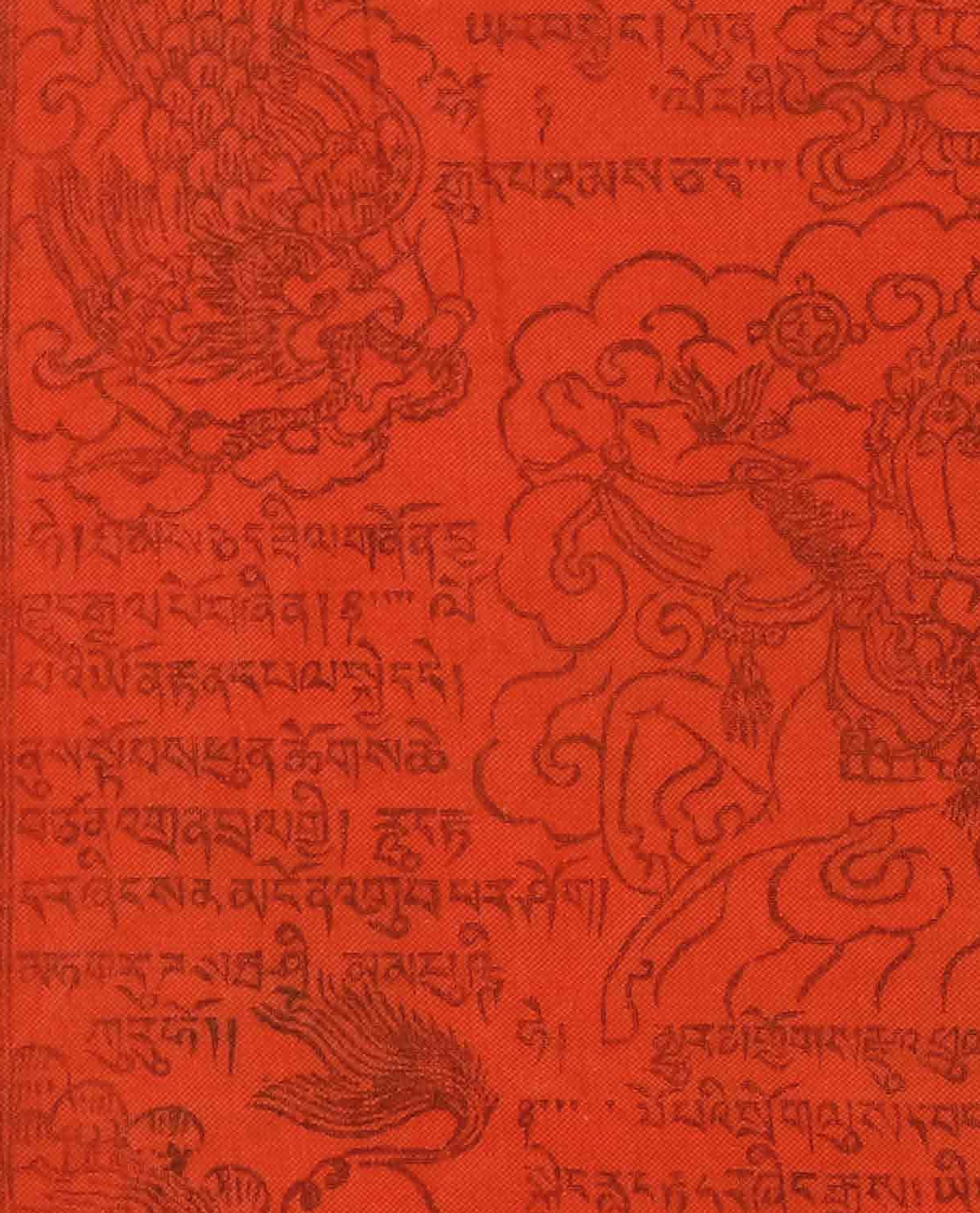
However, its cosmological connotations persist. Rasmussen, who once visited the Umingmaktormiut, made explicit reference to them: “Sometimes a ring is formed around the sun; it is called *qilauta*, the sun drum, because it forms a figure around the sun, just like the drum when it is used in the ceremonial house during the festival. We are not sure what this means. Some people think, quite simply, that it is because it resembles the drum we dance with; the sun drum is a harbinger that something pleasant will happen. If it is not a ring, but only an arch that forms around the sun, it is called *nataineq*, a term that refers to the wooden part on the edge of the drum. This means that someone has died”. (Rasmussen 1932: 23)

This last example suggests that the drum evokes both the beating of life and the dead.

One aspect to note is the practice of dancers closing their eyes when they reach the heart of their dance and exclaim “aaaaaah”. The closing of the eyes suggests that it is indeed the eye of the drum that is operating at a specific moment. Individual vision gives way to the vision that the drum allows. According to some elders, the drum could occasionally start to speak on its own.

A final rule to mention about drum dancing is that it had to be completed in its entirety. It was unthinkable to stop in the middle, which again brings us back to this cosmological dimension of the drum and its role in maintaining relationships between the living and the dead. As such, Donald Suluk de Arviat shared a very revealing memory: “A long time ago, drum dancing played a very important role in the Inuit way of life. This translates into an extreme example: it was accepted that if a person died while dancing, others had to take over until the dance was over, only then could mourning begin. Even if the loved ones of the dancer who had just died were suffering, they had to keep on dancing because traditional law dictated that this should be so. If there weren’t many relatives present, others had to help and start dancing because the effort to rejoice always prevails”. (Bennett and Rowley 2004: 110)

Today, drum dancing sessions are celebrated in community halls or elders’ homes in Nunavut, in the Canadian Arctic, and also in Greenland, Labrador and Alaska. The dancer emits sounds, “ija ija” and then long exhalations, illustrating the connection made with other worlds. Many dancers tell of seeing their ancestors in these performances, further proof that the function of the drum and what it enables continues despite transformations in the object itself and in society where shamanism has become invisible. **FL and AMV**

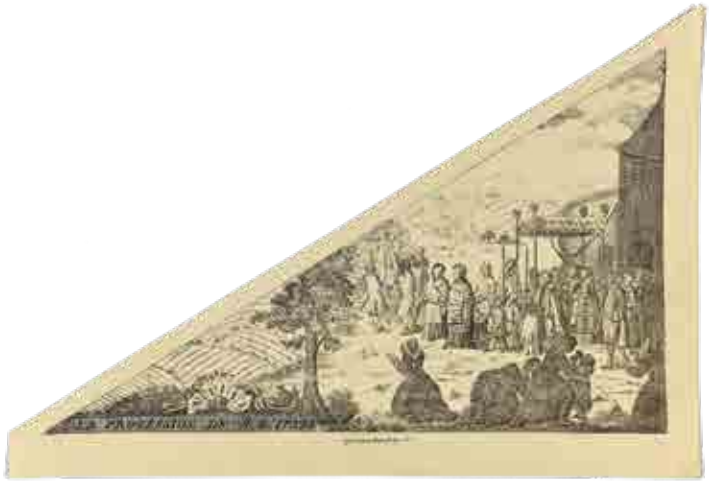


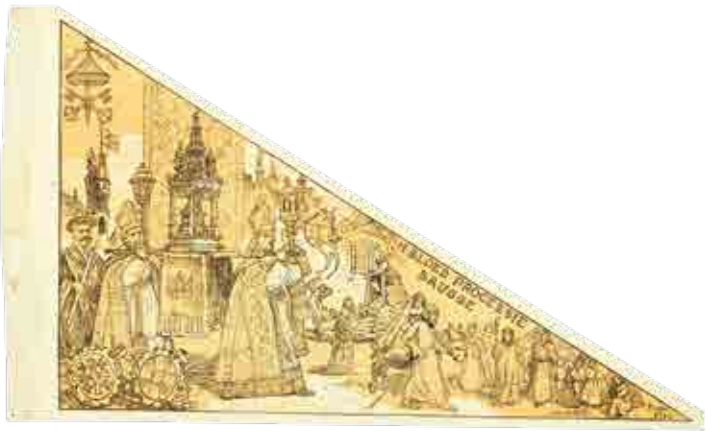
Objects activated, objects handled

The experience of children's games teaches us that a toy, such as a doll, gains, in the child's imagination, additional life by being handled. We could speak of an activating principle, which means that an inert object (and this is not characteristic of anthropomorphic objects) becomes meaningful or provides meaning by being handled, and moreover acquires a certain agentivity, to use the term coined the anthropologist Alfred Gell, i.e. an ability to act on the world, things, beings, and to transform or influence them. This is the characteristic of the objects that accompany rites, and are, so to speak, extensions thereof, in the sense that they constitute the necessary complement to the gestures performed in the ritual; they are sometimes the essential agent in the performance and effectiveness of the rite. Moving, carrying, walking around, giving or exchanging, veiling and unveiling, dressing, opening or closing, shaking or mixing, hitting, lifting, brandishing... these are all ritual actions, very often codified (we might use the term orthopraxis), which actualise the powers of the object and activate it. As such, they are both performed objects, in the sense that they are handled, and performative objects, in the sense that their handling produces something. But still, charged with human intentions and those lent to invisible actors, they can also become autonomous from action and handling, and charged with their own history and multiple experiences, lead a life of their own. The object thus becomes a subject.

Among the forms that this handling can take, displacement and perambulation in space, which is also space-time, are fundamental; they contribute to validating and broadening the powers attributed to an object. This is shown by the practice, still very much alive today in the Catholic world, of processions of objects (relics, statues, the Blessed Sacrament, etc.) represented on drapes that retain their memory. Musée L holds many examples. In the case of figurative pieces, such as a sculpture that gives rise to a given devotion or even cult, the simple fact of moving it according to a precise ritual animates it. According to an anthropomorphic logic, whatever moves is alive. Such is the case in the culture of the former Southern Netherlands and the statues of Mary endowed with miraculous powers, whose cult developed in the seventeenth century. During the *Ommegang*, the statues were carried in a procession around the city (as implied in the term *ommegang*, which may be translated as "going around"). These processions, which are repeated every year on the occasion of patron saint festivals, often commemorate the original (miraculous or divine) translation of a statue to its place of worship – which lies, moreover, at the origin of its worship and miracles. As for the pilgrimage drapes worn by the participants during the festival, they are moving images of the object venerated. They actualise and augment the movement in the common space (by depicting a procession that is taking place) while perpetuating the memory when they are brought back and kept in the private space.

Sometimes these sculptures were dressed, like the statues of Mary or, following certain Catholic practices, especially in the Beguine convents,

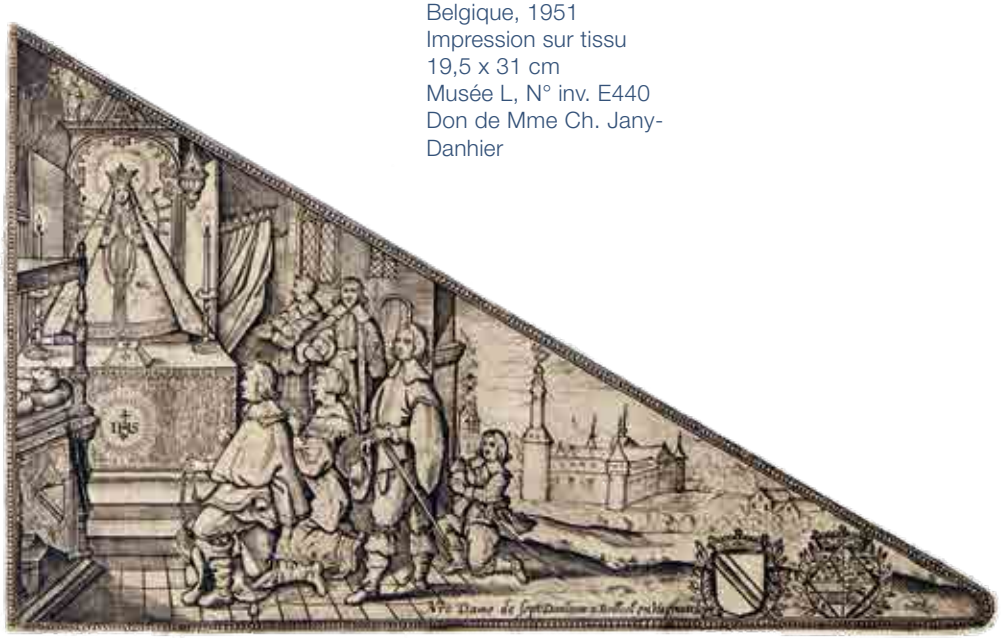




Drapelet de procession (Notre-Dame d'Ittre)
Belgique, vers 1850
Eau-forte
20,5 x 30 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E673
Don de Mme Ch. Jany-Danhier

Drapelet de procession (Notre-Dame de Basse-Wavre)
Belgique, 1951
Impression sur tissu
19,5 x 31 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E440
Don de Mme Ch. Jany-Danhier

Drapelet de procession (Saint-Sang à Bruges)
Belgique, 1945
Impression sur papier
25,7 x 42,7 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E553
Don de Mme Ch. Jany-Danhier



Drapelet de pèlerinage (Notre-Dame de Beloeil)
Belgique, 17e s.
Eau-forte et burin
24,6 x 33,8 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E532
Don de Mme Ch. Jany-Danhier

Attribué à l'atelier BORMAN
Berceau de Noël
Belgique, Bruxelles
Déb. 16e s.
Chêne, 62,5 × 34,5 × 17,5 cm
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, N° inv. BK-2013-14-1

small statues of the child Christ, the so-called "Mechelen" dolls, which were particularly fashionable in the late Middle Ages. These dolls were not only dressed, but also placed in finely worked cradles, decorated with bells that rang as they were rocked and placed on the altar at Christmas, in a way assimilating the event of Christ's birth to the presentation of the host on the altar at each mass.

Poupée représentant l'Enfant Jésus
Belgique, Malines, S.d.
Bois
22,5 x 12 x 7 cm
Musée L, N° inv. BO663
Donation Boyadjian

Vierge à l'Enfant recouverte d'un drap de lin
Belgique, 15e s.
Bois et toile
95,5 x 27,8 x 24,1 cm
Musée L, N° inv. VH172
Legs F. Van Hamme

The veiled statue refers to the practice of covering images with a sheet during Lent in Western Christianity.

Such practices, involving a tactile encounter with the object, recall not only the importance of the materiality of the object but also the importance of textiles in Christian rites of activation of the power of images. The simple gestures of veiling and unveiling images, objects (a reliquary, a monstrance, etc.), sometimes even entire spaces reserved for the rite, participate in the revelation and institution of a particular sacred object. For example, the drape depicting Our Lady of Beloeil shows how the textile, in successive layers, covers the body of the statue, the chalice, the altar, and the altar space closed by curtains, creating an appropriate setting for veneration. Or again, the statue presented here veiled with a linen sheet refers to the practice, still in use today, of covering crucifixes, statues and paintings in a church with an opaque veil, usually purple, during the time of the Passion (i.e. the time before Easter, dedicated to the commemoration of the events that preceded and accompanied the death of Christ), as a sign of mourning.

Thangka *Rta nag 'gos lo* n°5
Tibet, 18e s.
Détrempe sur coton
67 x 42 cm
Bruxelles, Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire
N° inv. VER.292

© Photo : A.-M. Vuillemenot

Thangka activée car découverte
Ladakh, Monastère de Lamayuru, 2010

In the Buddhist world, Tibetan paintings, or *thangka*, also have a veil to cover them. It is rolled up or unrolled according to the rhythm of addresses, through the recitation of mantras to the various Buddhas, Taras, deities, experienced as literally embodied in these representations. The gesture of unveiling allows the activation of the *thangka*, while the veiling protects not the representations but the deities at work on and in this *thangka*, from any defilement. The craftsmen-artists of these paintings work with great respect and veneration, and take care to keep these objects free from contamination even during their manufacture. As a support to the visualisations of the Vajrayana practitioners, the paintings receive daily and repeated offerings, starting with the light of oil lamps, small barley flour sculptures reproducing different symbols of Tibetan Buddhism and money deposited by the practitioners during the recitation of mantras. The practice of recitation enables the accumulation of virtues and the assurance of an ideally desired reincarnation. Meaning “roll-up paintings”, the *thangka* originally designed for the nomadic or itinerant lifestyle of many Tibetans were made to be taken away. They vary in size, and some of them can completely cover the facade of the inner courtyard of a monastery. These immense *thangka* are only brought out to be seen and used on the monastery’s feast day or for the great cyclical festivals in Tibetan Buddhism.

Photo: J.-P. Bougnet

Pixyde
Limoges, 13e s.
Cuivre doré et émaillé
9,5 x 6,6 cm
Namur, Musée diocésain
N° inv. 16
Trésor de la cathédrale
Saint-Aubain

Like thangkas, many ritual objects can be carried, moved and taken away. Such is the case of pyxides, small cylindrical boxes with a lid which have been used since the early days of Christianity to carry the Eucharist to the sick. Pyxides were gradually replaced by ciboriums or monstrances, receptacles with a base that holds or exposes the host. The thirteenth-century example exhibited here, decorated with enamels, is quite characteristic of the production of the period.

In addition, there are objects whose handling contributes to magnifying the sensorial experience of the ritual, such as light fixtures, sound objects or objects that diffuse a scent. Reinforcing the synesthetic experience of the rite, these objects open up to the immaterial and other dimensions of practice.

Hence in the rites of *lha mo* and *lha pa* (oracles of Ladakh), the use of different objects allows for the possession of the body of the oracle by the deities: the *dorje*, the *dilbu* (bell), the *daru*/*damaru* (drum), and also ritual garments, incense and the light of oil lamps. Together these supports and extensions of the body of the oracle facilitate the incarnation of the *lha* (deities) in the body of the medium, manifested by a series of sudden jerking movements (see page 66).

© Catharijneconvent

Photo : J.-P. Bougnet

Maître de la Fontaine de vie
Messe de saint Grégoire
1505-1514
Huile sur panneau
92 x 78 cm
Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent
N° inv. RMCC s194-1

Photos: J.-P. Bougnet

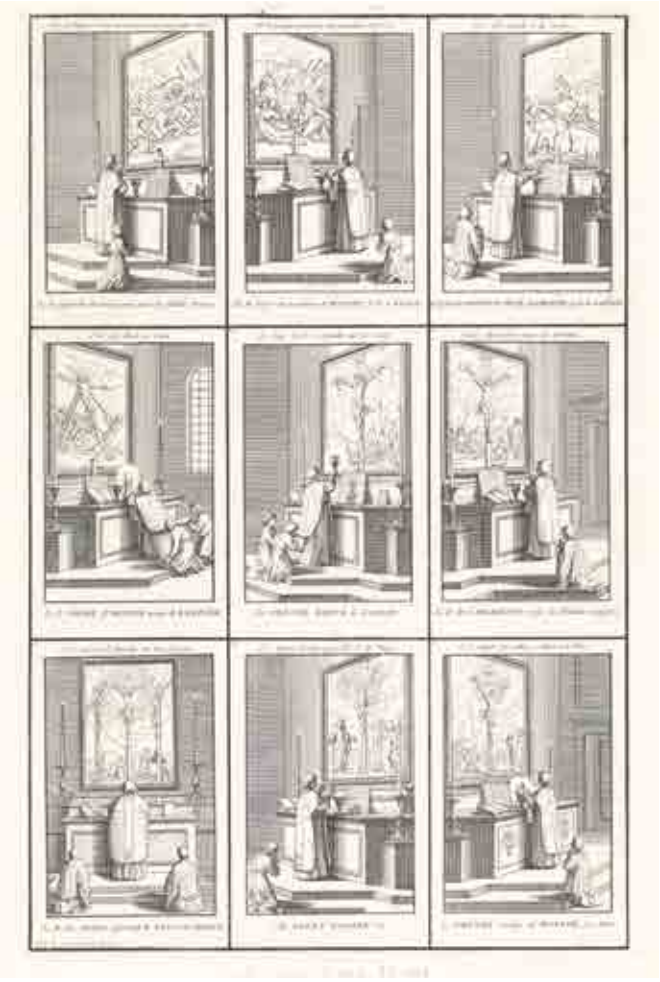
Encensoir
s.l., 1740-1741
Argent
22 x 8,5 cm
Namur, Musée diocésain
N° inv. 1552/1
Trésor de la chapelle de la Croix-Monet (Aische-en-Refail)

Clochette d'autel
s.l., 1749
Argent
11 x 17,5 cm
Namur, Musée diocésain
N° inv. 1552/5
Trésor de la chapelle de la Croix-Monet (Aische-en-Refail)

In the Catholic liturgy, altar bells, holy water seals (and sprinklers), censers (and thuribles), candlesticks, and even kisses of peace contribute to a multi-sensorial experience of the rite of mass. The scents of incense evoke the divine breath and provide a sense of transcendence spatially, temporally and materially. At once reminiscent, evocative and invocative, incense actualises the pleasant fragrance of Grace with which Christ was filled (Thomas Aquinas) and allows contact with the divinity. As for the altar bells that are rung during the Eucharistic ritual, a key moment in the liturgical celebration, they announce the presence of the divine, thus marking the sacrality of the action that takes place.

© KIKIRPA

Antoine GOUBAULT
Calice
Belgique, Mons,
1604-1605
Argent doré, battu et ciselé
24 x 18,6 cm
Namur, Musée diocésain
N° inv. 20
Trésor de la cathédrale
Saint-Aubain



© Rijksmuseum

Les séquences de la messe mises en parallèle avec les épisodes de la Passion du Christ
Gravure de B. PICARD,
extraite de S. LECLERC,
Les ceremonies des petites messes..., 1722
Eau-forte, 33,7 × 21,8 cm
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum
N° inv. RP-P-1911-3196

An abundance of literature determines the adoption of complex and extremely precise postures and gestures that the priest has to perform when pronouncing certain words and in the presence of certain objects, such as the chalice, and also in front of images, crosses, the tabernacle, relics, etc. These different objects imply different marks of honour and respect according to their hierarchy: tilting the head, genuflection, kissing, movement of the eyes towards the sky, etc. These images, taken from a seventeenth-century book intended to be read during mass, illustrate the behavioural elements of the priest ("the priest kisses the altar", "the priest uncovers the chalice", etc.). These gestures are visually linked to the Passion cycle (the various scenes of which appear on the altar board) and are accompanied by a short individual prayer or oration to be pronounced by the faithful reader-viewer.

The characteristic of all these different handlings is in fact that they are usually accompanied by prayers. The activation is as much gestural as it is verbal. The address to the divinity combines gesture and the uttering of words, prayers said secretly or sung aloud. In private devotion, a number of objects such as rosaries, prayer beads and small pious images bring together words and objects in the same ritual. Prayers activate the objects. The objects activate the prayers.

Linked to the Tibetan world, prayer wheels (*mane* or *mani*) enable the flow of the beautiful word, the one addressed to the invisible. Rolled up inside the wheel, the *om mani padme hum* mantra unfolds and flies away thanks to the rotational movement caused by *mane* meditator. This flight is coupled with the recitation of the mantra by the person who activates it. Whatever the appearance or richness of the prayer wheel, the essential thing is that it can rotate so that the words of the support where the Chenrezig mantra is inscribed can be heard at the same time as those pronounced by the person who rotates the wheel. Activation by gesture takes precedence over external decorum, as can be seen in some of the handcrafted copies. The important thing is that the flow of the recitation of the mantra inside the object is not interrupted.

The wind, water and sometimes certain animals wave Tibetan prayer flags just as much as human beings do. These quadrilaterals of coloured and printed mantra fabrics, “wind horses”, take part in the flow of addresses, and nourish the principle of harmonising the four major elements within the individual, symbolising the condition of each person. The printed horse carries on its back the triple or six-fold jewel “that makes wishes come true”. Gathered in a garland on ropes where each flag alternates with one of the five colours of Buddhism, these supports of the flow of mantras are stretched out on the tops of mountains and passes, on the roofs of monasteries and houses, attached to prayer poles and flapping in the wind, carrying away the words and thus the vibrations of the mantras that are written on them. In this way they take part in a vast network of addresses to the invisible, combining the different presences of humans, deities and multiple non-humans in the local environment.

© Photo : A.-M. Vuillemenot

© Photo : A.-M. Vuillemenot

Récitation quotidienne de mantras
Ladakh, Monastère de Lamayuru, 2010

Village de la vallée de la Nubra
Ladakh, 2013
La boîte de Nescafé remplace un moulin à prières, elle montre que l’essentiel (mantra de la grande compassion) est à l’intérieur du moulin et pas dans sa décoration extérieure.

Au-dessus du monastère de Lamayuru
Ladakh, 2010

© Photo : A.-M. Vuillemenot

© Photos : F. Laugrand

Mark TUNGILIK
Sculptures miniatures représentant des personnages
Canada, fin 20e s.
Fabriquées par l'artiste inuit avec deux de ses propres dents
Churchill, Eskimo Museum

Inuit
Ceinture chamanique *(angaluk ou tapsi)*
Canada, 2013
Fabriquée avec de la peau de caribou à laquelle sont suspendus par des tendons des « couteaux » miniatures *(qalugiujait)*
Churchill, Eskimo Museum

Ces objets, habituellement faits en os, sont considérés être les armes des esprits auxiliaires des chamanes.

Sometimes, it is the flow and exchange among people that activates the power of objects. This is the principle of giving, as illustrated by these small Inuit sculptures, made in 1983 by Mark Tungilik out of his own teeth, after they were taken out for medical reasons. They were given to the Bishop of the Hudson Bay Diocese, Mgr. Omer Robidoux at Easter. The two miniatures do contain some vital energy, but they have no power in themselves. However, the gift in return "activated" their power. On the one hand, the gestures of Bishop Omer Robidoux were able to heal Tungilik, who gave a gift to his healer, as is customary. By accepting these gifts, the bishop did not anticipate for even a second that these two miniatures might also be a means for Tungilik to act on him. By accepting a gift from him, Tungilik understood that the bishop had agreed to receive his protection. From this point of view, the object sanctions the transfer of power. Shamanic belts and *qalugiujait* thus convey the powers of those who have died and made them, for whoever acquires them.

Other objects, on the other hand, can only be handled by one and the same person, and are in a way the attribute of that person, such as the episcopal cross, which boasts the originality of having belonged to the same man. The iconography of Thomas-Louis Heylen's neo-gothic crosier is thus directly linked to the life of the prelate. First elected abbot of the Premonstratensian Abbey of Tongerloo in 1887, the crosier is shown above Saint Norbert (founder of the Order of the Premonstratensians), St Louis (baptismal name), St Thomas Beckett (chosen by the monk), and Julie Billiard, foundress of the Sisters of Notre-Dame de Namur, the congregation that donated the crosier. This one is so personalised that it could not be worn by anyone else. It bears his motto as Abbot, "*Prudence and Simplicity*", which he applied as a bishop.

Photos : J.-P. Bougnet

Atelier A. H. HAAN
Crosse abbatiale prémontrée (détails)
Anvers, vers 1887
Argent doré
188 x 20 cm
Namur, Musée diocésain
N° inv. 1370
Don des Sœurs de Notre-Dame

While some objects are intimately linked to the individual for whom they were created, others are endowed with autonomy, attached however to the intentions that these objects carry. This is the case with many objects, such as relics and objects that keep traces of contact with their history and ritual experience. This is also the case, in the region of the Kazakh and Central Asian steppes and mountains, with the Korans used in certain healing rites and during consultations with the *bakhsi* (Sufi shaman). Without being read, they are present, open and touched, functioning as spatiotemporal markers of ritual practices, as transmitters between daily space-time and ritual space-time. **RD, CH, AJL, FL and AMV**

Tambourine, ritual bell, *dorje* and white stole

Tambourin bouddhique
Népal, 20e s.
Bois, cuir et coton
10 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E1124
Collection Claire et Robert Steichen

All three instruments belong to the *lha pa* and *lha mo* (oracles) but are also used by Buddhist nuns and monks. The *dorje, vajra* in Sanskrit, is the "diamond, symbol of indestructibility and purity" (Cornu, 1997: 254). The *dilbu* is a ritual bell; it accompanies the *dorje*. The *daru/ damaru* is a "small double-sided tambourine made of skull bones or wood, with balls, used in tantric rituals" (Cornu, 1997) 231, and in all the rites of *lha mo* and *lha pa*. The white stole or *khata* is part of the practice of circulating offerings.

Each oracle encountered during my ethnographic surveys, between 2010 and 2015, has an almost identical life story: designation in dreams by deities or ancestors; necessity and constraint to accept the role, position and charge of oracle; acknowledgement by an authority of the Ladakh Buddhist hierarchy in the person of the Rinpoche of Stakna monastery (a monastery attached to the Drukpa lineage and school); initiation by oracles confirmed and acknowledged by the communities; practices of consultation and care of the altars of the deities who possess them. This itinerary is completed by the purchase of the ritual clothing necessary for the practice as well as the acquisition of the ritual objects presented here.

***Ghanta*, clochette rituelle**
Népal, 20e s.
Alliage de cinq métaux fondus
16,6 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E1145
Collection Claire et Robert Steichen

***Vajra (ou dorje)*, diamant**
Népal, avant 1978
Alliage fondu
11,5 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E1144
Collection Claire et Robert Steichen

Following is a simplified example of ritual sequences. First of all, the *lha mo* (oracle) kneels before the small altar built around reproductions of thangkas representing a bodhisattva of compassion and a medicine Buddha. A small portrait of the Dalai Lama and that of Gyalwang Drugpa (leader of the Drukpa school) are placed in front of the other images. The *lha mo* places seven bowls in front of the altar. Two bowls overflow with barley grain with two incense sticks placed in them; three contain water, one tea, while another one contains *sur*/*bsur*, a mixture of butter and flour. Then the *lha mo* places next to it a *phurbu* (a sort of long dagger, the blade of which has three sides of a flattened isosceles triangle) in a sheath, a small cannula or "pipe, *pu-ri*" and a stainless steel bowl. She unfolds her ritual garments in front of her while she recites mantras, gargles with *susma* (butter tea) and goes outside to spit, where she performs ablutions, quickly washes her face, hands and forearms with water, starts belching and blowing noisily at a jerky pace. A young woman accompanies her to serve as a ritual helper. She pours water for the *lha mo*, exchanges *khata* with those present, maintains the incense smoke and also serves as a translator when the deities express themselves in Tibetan through the mouth of the *lha mo*. She is in fact a transformed ladhaki, but the role of intermediary interpreter between the deities

present in the body of the oracle and the participants in the rite is essential.

The *lha mo* then rushes into the house, walking automatically while hitting herself in the middle of the back with her right fist, and kneels down again before the altar reciting prayers and invoking the *lha*. She turns her head, her eyes are bulging. Then she puts on the pieces of her *lha mo* costume one by one. One by one, she names the *lha*, the deities who invest her, while she is getting dressed. At each stage, she seems to be plunged a little more into the trance of possession. First she puts on a Tibetan apron, then a short lozenge-shaped chasuble or stole passes over her head, and ties a red cotton scarf in front of her face and another on her hair. Her body twitches more beautifully and she finally places a five-sided crown on her head.

The *lha mo* grasps her *dorje* and *dilbu* with her left hand, then with her right hand, her *daru* or *damaru*. She shakes these three instruments quickly, but in a regular rhythm. The volume increases; the *lha mo* now shouts the mantras she was reciting more peacefully at first. She turns to the participants in the rite, still kneeling, and the *lha* begin to express themselves through her. The oracle puts down the *dorje* and the bell, and with small jerky gestures, throws barley grains onto one side of the small drum. According to her, the number and position of the grains allow the *lha* (deities) to give advice, to say what needs to be done in order to be cured or to solve a problem; it is they who act, manifest themselves and hold the word that the participants in the rite listen to with great attention; if someone does not understand very well, the others intervene to explain and complete the message.

The consultants in turn hand out a *khata*, not to the *lha mo* but to the deities, to pay homage to them, before stating the

reason for their participation in the rite and their request. The *lha* answer by the voice of the oracle, transformed, of a completely different timbre from that which precedes the possession, delivering fast, jerky and toneless words.

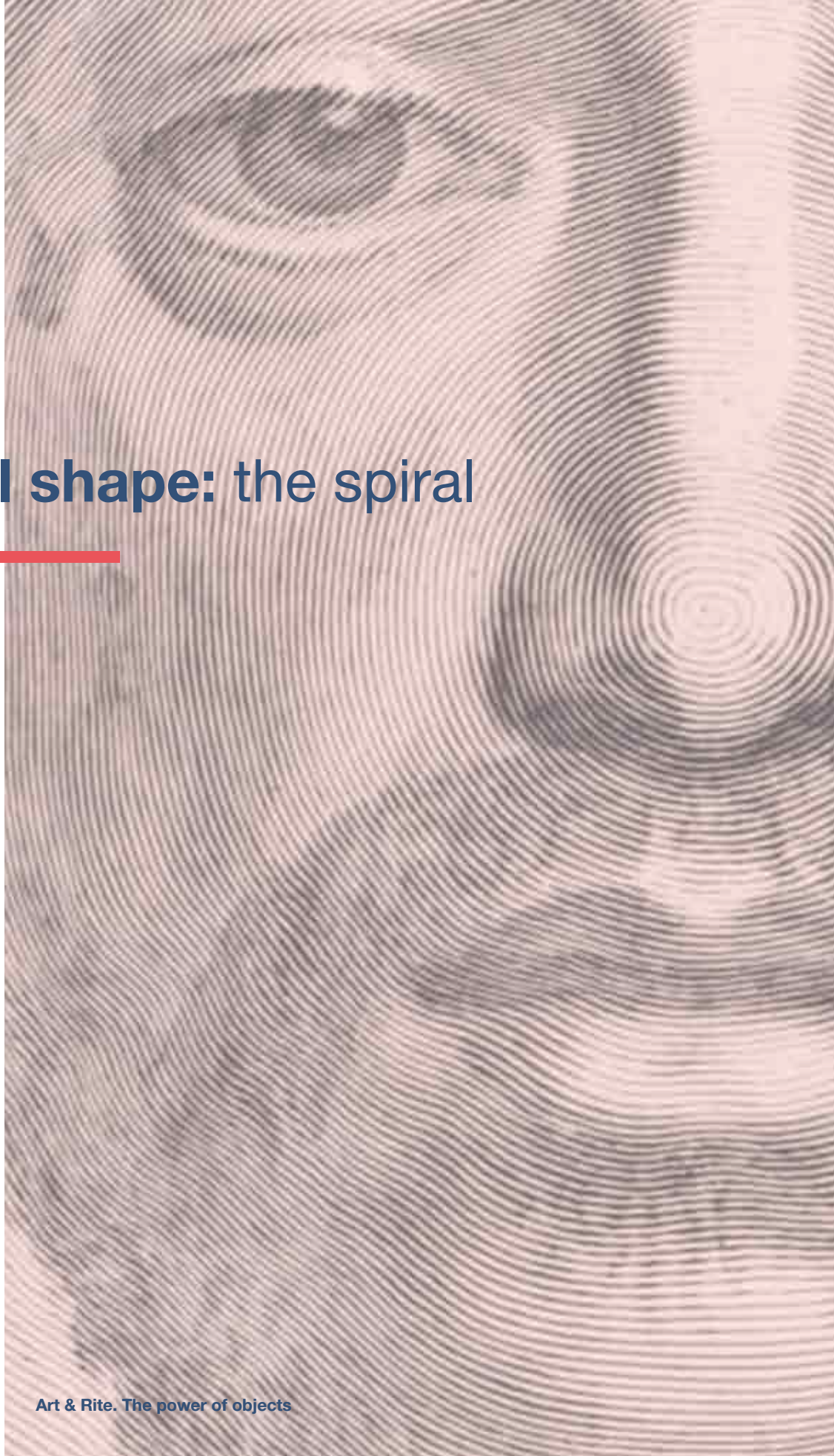
The *lha* do not express themselves in the vernacular language immediately comprehensible to all. The intervention of one or more helpers close to the *lha mo* or *lha pa* is regularly required in order to translate. If the sessions are accessible to all, a double filter keeps the *lha*'s words at a distance from everyone, by means of the red scarf in front of the medium's mouth and a language made unintelligible.

The first part of the rite comes to an end. The actual physical treatments begin. The *lha mo* asks one of the consultants to stand with her back to her and raise her garment. She feels, touches, bends down, splutters and blows three times on the painful areas located before beginning the extraction of the pain by successive direct suctions. The other people hold the consultant up, as he seems to suffer a lot during this manoeuvre. Between each aspiration, the oracle spits into the stainless steel bowl which contains a bottom of water. Little by little, the water turns black and becomes filled with dark filaments. The *lha mo* turns again to face the altar, and recites mantras in order to get rid of the evil extracted from the back. Identical sequences follow one another with other consultants.

Finally, while chanting, thanking the *lha* one after the other, the oracle gradually removes all the elements of her ritual garb. She emerges completely out of the trance and calmly wraps her belongings in a bundle which she slips behind the altar. The participants leave the place where the rite is held as they are treated. **AMV**

***Khata,* écharpe bouddhique**
Tibet, S.d.
Soie, 106 x 29,5 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E1085
Collection Claire et Robert Steichen

A ritual shape: the spiral



As Tim Ingold writes, “As walking, talking and gesticulating creatures, human beings generate lines wherever they go. It is not just that line-making is as ubiquitous as the use of the voice, hands and feet – respectively in speaking, gesturing and moving around – but rather that it subsumes all these aspects of everyday human activity and, in so doing, brings them together into a single field of inquiry.” (Ingold, 2007: 7). Just as lines do, human beings produce spirals that are mostly taken from the environment, from the surrounding world and from the cosmos, all of which provide examples. From the double helix of DNA to the expanding movement of the universe, the spiral can be found everywhere, and is good for thinking about the world, movement, energy, origins and infinity.

Examples abound. From the cosmic serpent present in Amerindian, African and Asian cosmologies; from the ancient Greek caduceus of the god Hermes to the Aesculapius’ rod for doctors and the cup of Hygiene of the pharmacists; or again, from the tail of the dragon of the Hydra conquered by Ulysses to that of the tail of the dragon slain by Saint George, the spiral covers myths and eras.

Similarly, Baroque art is built entirely on the momentum of the spiral; Rubens is not the least representative of it. Alongside motifs that abound in Baroque art and almost constitute its signature, such as twisted columns, double or opposing spirals, volutes and helical forms, there are the Baroque compositions themselves, which deploy an internal diagonal and/or spiral dynamic, reflecting a collective interest in such a movement.

The Haitian neologism invented by Frankétienne, Jean-Claude Fignolé and René Philoctète in the 1960s - spiralism - corresponds to a literary and more generally artistic movement that claims the will to describe a/ the reality of a world in perpetual movement. What could be better than the metaphor of the spiral to think about movement, diachrony, ascendancy and descent!

Echoing this shared, used, interpreted and symbolically charged pattern, which varies according to the cultural context, the spiral bubble in the exhibition brings together a few examples of helical representations and uses.

Objects from Musée L’s cabinet of curiosities, from Oceania and selected objects from the reserves are all displayed here. As in some regions of the Himalayas, similar logics can be found in Papua New Guinea.

Sculpted on a figurehead, metaphorized on a shield, represented naturally on a ritual shell, danced with drums or engraved on a human skull, the figure of the spiral is omnipresent in the Papuan initiation and funeral ritual universe, marked by the ongoing search for a cosmological balance between the living and the dead.

Figure de proue
Îles Trobriand, 20e s.
Bois, 62 x 79 x 9,5 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E1530
Collection Claire et
Robert Steichen

Canoés décorés pour la Kula
Îles Trobriand, 1965
University of
Wollongong Archives
D160/03/440 et
D160/03/441

© Photos: R. Cochrane

Asmat
Bouclier nommé *jamasj*
Nouvelle-Guinée, 20e s.
Bois
146 x 39,8 x 6 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E1525
Collection Claire et Robert Steichen

Coquillage *(Conus betilinus)* pour la Kula
Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée, 20e s.
Coquille
7,5 x 7 x 12 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E1875
Collection Claire et Robert Steichen

Coiffe à plumes d'oiseau de Paradis
Nouvelle-Guinée
Milieu 20e s. (?)
Plume, fourrure et fibre végétale
80 x 25 x 21 cm
Tervuren, Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale
N° inv. EO.1967.25.63

The initiatory rituals for the regeneration of the clan involve expeditions of head-hunters, who wearing figureheads and shields, display motifs that frighten the enemy and repel evil spirits.

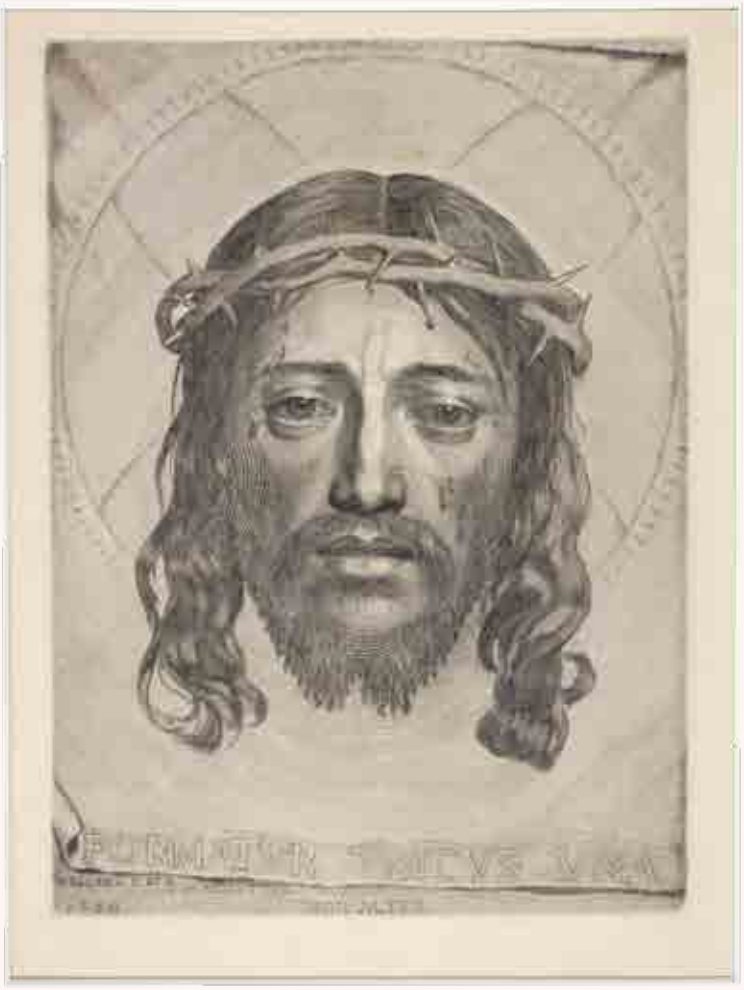
These figureheads are also associated with the *kula* ritual, which involves vast, cyclical, two-way sea voyages bearing gifts and counter-gifts of spiral shells.

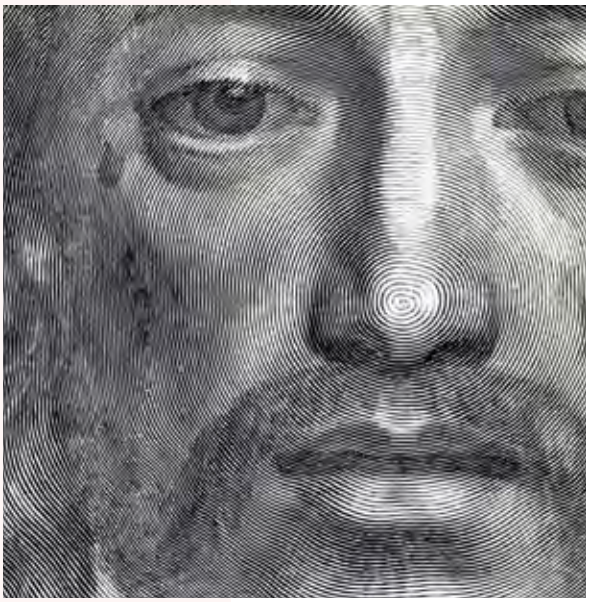
The alternating representations of fruit bats on the shield are associated with the continuity between life and death, symbolised by the balance of the spiral.

Crâne d'ancêtre
Nouvelle-Guinée, s.d.
Os
13,5 x 12,5 x 19 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E1529
Collection Claire et Robert Steichen

Asmat
Tambour
Nouvelle-Guinée, 20e s.
Bois et peau de lézard
67,8 x 23 x 18 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E1528
Collection Claire et Robert Steichen

Funeral rituals are performed by whirling dancers, who, wearing *bird of paradise* feathers, simulate their nuptial dances with pendulum movements that draw the spirit of the dead person into the hollow part of the drum. When struck, they send the deceased back to the underworld of the ancestors, who swirl in the opposite direction as depicted by the double spiral engraved on the skull.





Claude Mellan
La Sainte Face : visage du Christ apparaissant sur le linge de sainte Véronique, 1649
Estampe sur papier,
43 x 32 cm
Musée L
N° inv. ES1149
Fonds Suzanne Lenoir

In a Christian context, the spiral is also rich in meaning. For example, the exceptional Holy Face of Christ produced by the French engraver Claude Mellan in 1649. This image depicts Veronica's veil, the miraculous portrait of Christ obtained by applying a cloth to his face on the way to Golgotha. A real technical tour de force, the engraving consists of a single line spiralling out from the nose. This line consists of a single chisel stroke whose thickness (varying according to the progressive penetration of the tool into the metal plate) forms the dark areas and shapes the model. It is therefore the irregularities of the line that bring out the (perfect) volume of Christ. The chisel technique forces the tool to remain in the same position, while the plate, which is placed on a cushion, rotates. The spiral is a creative and visual rite. This technical feat responds to the uniqueness of the "portrait of portraits". The words at the foot of the image *Formatur unicus una, non alter* ("Something Unique made from something Unique, not another") confirms this, although not without a touch of ambiguity. It means at the same time the unique miraculous imprint of Christ is printed by the unique hand of God, and also Christ, from a unique person, the Virgin, is here produced by a single line, by the hand of Mellan.

Le Christ énergétique
Extrait du manuscrit intitulé Cantiques Rothschild
France, Région de Thérouanne
Vers 1300
Manuscrit sur parchemin
11,8 x 8,4 cm
Yale, Beinecke Library
MS 404, f°98 r

While serving the self-proclamation of the engraver, the spiral is therefore also a visual discourse on divine nature. In this regard Mellan draws on a long-standing Christian culture that makes the spiral (*spiraculum*) an "essential theological motif for understanding the movement of spiritual energy in relation to its activation by God" (Palazzo, 2020: 207). This evocation of the breath of the spirit sent by God is formally translated in the famous manuscript known as Rothschild's Song of Songs by the rays that show the activation of the spiral's energy and the swirling wind. Thanks to its endless energetic quality, the spiral is also the ideal representation of spiritual ascent, as shown by the presence of labyrinths or spirals on the pavements of medieval churches, inviting, by analogy, the Christian to accomplish his spiritual path from the paving in the building. **CB, CH and AMV**

Games of scale

This is a fairly common experience that anyone can check: changes in scale contribute to changing our relationship to the objects that surround us and which we interact with. These changes affect the value we place on objects. For example, enlargements can help to exalt an object, to give it a certain prestige that its usual size does not entail. Conversely, miniaturising can give an object a certain preciousness and exert a fascination for technical prowess. Of course, it all depends on the cultural context in which the very ideas of prestige and preciousness linked to the change in scale are born.

Amulette bouddhique
Thaïlande, fin 20e s.
Terre cuite et fibre végétale
2,9 x 2,2 x 0,3 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E1456
Collection Claire et Robert Steichen

Once transposed to symbolic worlds, games of scale can become markers of sacrality, effectively distancing the practitioner from the object, which is thus invested with a certain aura, or even a sacred dimension. Whether through oversizing or miniaturisation, the object is distinguished from the profane world, or rather it is moved into the margin (the *pro-fanum* is literally what is in front of the sacred).

The aim is to present and represent a god, a divinity, a demonic or non-demonic spirit figure, near or far, ancestor or master possessor of places, etc., and to equip oneself with ritual supports and tools that will allow for the staging and acting of relations interwoven with the invisible. The size of the media and objects of worship depends first and foremost on the context of pronouncement and representation of the relations in question.

When it comes to rituality in the Christian context, the two scales (large and small) play in favour of community liturgy on the one hand, and intimate and private spirituality on the other. Perceived and often experienced at a distance by the faithful, the objects that were used in the ritual of the mass before the Second Vatican Council were mostly large, so that they stood out in the congregation, as did the ample and imposing clothing worn by the celebrants. The grandeur of this liturgical apparatus was not only a question of size and therefore weight – sometimes making it difficult to handle – but also one of richness, the one going hand in hand with the other.

At the other end of the scale, miniaturisation initiates a relationship of proximity, that of private devotion or intimate spirituality, even if the preciousness of the religious objects thus miniaturised introduces a certain distance, at least avoiding touch, to preserve these small reserves of sacral power evoked/convoked by the almost miraculous feat represented by these small crafted jewels. They can be seen as a microcosm which the devotee interacts with in his mind. We could also speak of a space of imaginary and spiritual projection.

Some of these objects, which on this occasion can be handled, also share many common features with objects related to the world of games and childhood, since games and rites have obvious anthropological affinities. Let us think, for example, of the old sets of small liturgical objects once given to children so that they could play during mass. In a

© Photo : A.-M. Vuillemenot

Bouddha géant
Ladakh, Vallée de la Nubra, 2010

way, miniaturisation for adults is part of a form of regression, a return to a great intimacy, even a certain confusion between object and being (for example small devotional images such as the aptly named “Mechelen dolls”, and also between the sacred and the profane. Miniaturisation nevertheless helps to keep the believer at a distance from those small things, which by their size remind him that they are fictitious and fabricated. The fact remains that their religious, even sacred, value depends on this reduction in size, combined with the idea of preciousness and microcosm.

Other cultural contexts, such as those of Tibetan Buddhism, Hinduism and Central Asian and Himalayan shamanism, deploy on daily basis games of scale of ritual objects in the space of the mountain, the village, the city or at a crossroads. It is not uncommon for a statue of an immense Buddha to impose and imprint its presence on places linked to the hugeness of the Himalayas. Echoing the monasteries suspended from the mountainsides and the votive constructions located at crossroads, near springs or mountain passes, these gigantic monuments map the present world and the invisible worlds, weaving multiple links between humans and non-humans.

Pende
Amulette *Ikhoko*
République démocratique du Congo, 20e s.
Ivoire
6,5 x 1,6 x 1,7 cm
Musée L, N° inv. A688
Don de Mme Nicole Van Impe

Suku
Masque géant *Kakuungu*
République démocratique du Congo
Collecté par le Père O. Butaye dans le village de Mwela
Vers 1920
Bois gravé et pigments
87 x 41 x 32 cm
Tervuren, Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale,
N° inv. EO.0.0.34017

Likewise, Indian cities abound with colossal deities that arise from a tangle of boulevards, bridges and alleys, where in the density of the contemporary urban fabric, gigantic statues impose themselves in a different way than in a largely open space. The latter point is a counterpart to the much smaller statues, nestled in altars built at every intersection or change of direction, where offerings of flowers, fruit and pigments are accumulated daily.

Arbre à souhaits
Kazakhstan, 2013

The shamanic dimension is also present in Central Asian and Himalayan spaces through a multitude of signs paying homage to the masters who own the places or asking for protection. A good example of these spatial markers of relations between humans and invisible multiples is the wishing tree, where everyone hangs a piece of their clothing to ensure that they will travel peacefully and be protected. Quite literally, the fragment of fabric acts as a miniature of the actual garment, physically projecting the presence of the wearer.

Among the plethora of possible examples, the *Art & Rite* exhibition has made a choice according to the circumstances and stories that have brought certain objects to Musée L. The associations of objects in this section all tend to deploy a game of scales that enriches the worlds of meaning in different cultural contexts and through different times. These objects are by no means exhaustive, but rather exemplary. Some African amulets are linked to the ritual power and effectiveness of masks – in the same cultural context, of course – protecting people against evil, misfortune and disease. Similarly, the Buddhist amulet protects, invokes and evokes the various different figures of Buddha, however gigantic they may be.

Autel sous verre avec ostensoir, chandeliers et bouquets
s.l., s.d.
Papier, textile et papier "métallique"
25 x 20 x 7,5 cm
Musée L, N° inv. BO624
Donation Boyadjian

Pendentif-ostensoir avec deux anges
s.l., fin 17e s.
Métal, verre et peinture
5,2 x 2,4 x 1,2 cm
Musée L, N° inv. BO1012
Donation Boyadjian

Nicolas WODON
Ostensoir-soleil
Namur, 1764
Argent, alliage de cuivre doré et verroteries
Hauteur 70 cm
Namur, Musée diocésain, N° IRPA 10004885
Dépôt de la Fabrique Saint-Rémi de Franc-Waret

Photos: J.-P. Bougnet

A completely different universe of meaning opens up in the Inuit world, where the miniature precedes the model insofar as the tarniq soul is believed to be a miniature of the being that hosts it. In this context, miniatures always have a power of substitution and transformation.

Inherited and handed down from Ancient Greece, the kore with its enigmatic smile is displayed opposite another young woman from the sixth century BC – from Tanagra – both draped as offerings to the deities.

Inuit
Couteau à neige *pana*
Vers 1950
Bois et métal, 49,5 cm
Collection privée
Fr. Laugrand

Inuit
Couteaux à neige *qalugiujait*
Vers 1940
Os, 9 et 11 cm
Collection privée
Fr. Laugrand

As for the monstrance, the Christian pendant and the altar globe refer through the use of beauty and the immediately significant games of scale to the omnipresence of the divine in ritual and daily life.

We can say that by reproducing an altar on a miniature scale, it was supposed to create a microcosm that quite literally boxed up the high altar with the sun monstrance in the middle. This kind of object thus took a miniaturised fragment from the most sacred place in the church into the private space of everyday life. In the image of the small-scale liturgical objects, intended for children who were thus encouraged to "play" during mass, this box, which can only be contemplated, was supposed to set in motion in its holders a process that was both projective and introspective, a purely imaginary process for a purely interior ritual.

From the gigantic mask worn to the miniaturised altar contemplated, immersive and projective effects are played out, in close relation to the size of the objects. **RD and AMV**

Gigantic African mask

Photo anonyme, droits réservés

This gigantic mask, known as a *kakuungu*, was used among the Suku in Central Africa as part of the *mukanda*, an initiation ritual which adolescent boys had to submit to. The ritual began with circumcision and was followed by several months' reclusion in a camp outside the village. Here circumcised young men were placed under the supervision of adults who taught them certain skills relating to both sexuality and the learning of various activities useful for their future family and community life, and knowledge of laws and customs. The end of this initiatory journey, marked by harsh bullying and deprivation, implied the end of childhood and the real entry into the world of Men.

While some of the masks used in this ritual were worn by circumcised young men during dances marking the end of their initiation, the same was not true of the *kakuungu*, which was the exclusive possession of the *isidika*/*kisidika*, i.e. the great ritual specialist of the *mukanda*. One of the particular functions of this gigantic mask was to protect young people undergoing initiation from a number of threats, particularly those emanating from the evil *baloki* (sorcerers). Closely related to the vital liquid, i.e. blood, the *kakuungu* could intervene if a haemorrhage were to affect one of the young boys during the operation to remove his foreskin. Unlike the other masks used in this initiation ritual, which were destroyed after their use, the *kakuungu* was preserved. Indeed, this *nkisi* (charm) mask could also be used in other contexts, notably in the framework of certain healing rites relating to problems of impotence and sterility.

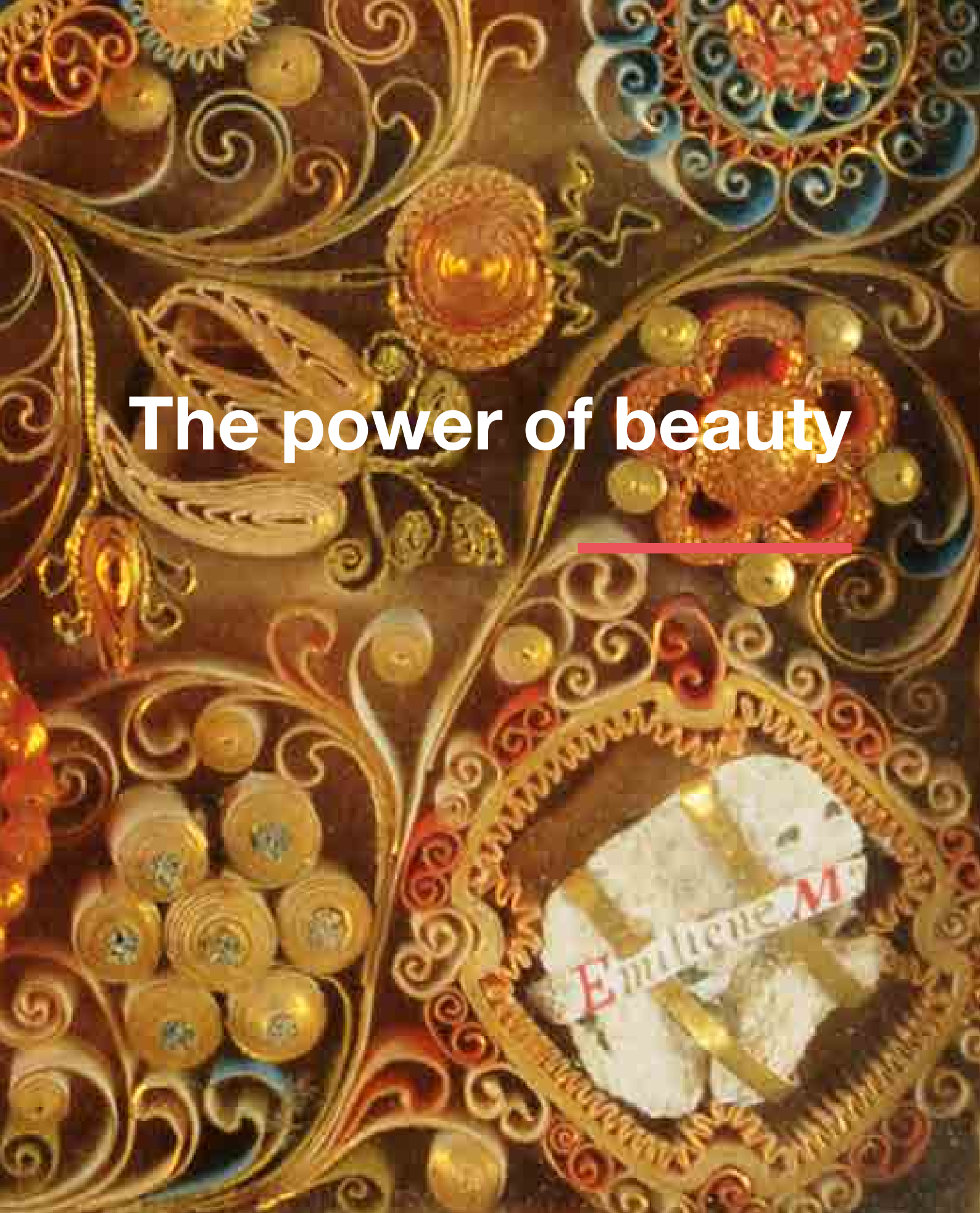
When customs changed, the *kakuungu* gradually disappeared and no longer exists in our own days. Among the Yaka of the Pelende area, Kakungu still made use of the *mukanda* in the 1950s.

With a few exceptions, *kakuungu* are characterised by their red and white colour, their big cheeks... and above all their huge size. In fact, along with the so-called *ndunga* masks of the Kongo-Woyo, *kakuungu* are the most imposing wooden masks in Congo-Kinshasa.

The large size of the *kakuungu*, which is common to all pieces, is certainly not a matter of artistic fantasy but rather it fully participates in its symbolism and function. It should be borne in mind here that the *kakuungu* relies on its frightening appearance, something its huge size is not alien to, in order to fulfil certain specific functions. When it appeared before the boys submitting to the *mukanda* shortly before circumcision, it was there to protect them by intimidating them and acting as a "colossal bodyguard" against the *baloki* we mentioned above. Through its appearance, however, this red-faced Goliath also contributed to subduing the young through fear, in order to enjoin them to respect and obey the elders. **JV**

Masque *Kakuungu*
République démocratique du Congo, Suku, s.d.
Archives photographiques du MRAC Tervuren
N° inv. EP.0.0.14597

The power of beauty



A rite is not an intellectual event: it is an experience. In a ritual setting, a "charm", which comes from the Latin *carmen*, "magic formula, incantation", takes place. Understanding where this energy comes from implies acknowledging that efficiency does not primarily concern the conceptual, but rather the sensitive and the sensorial. The ritual device is emotionally appealing: its compliance mechanisms are based, among other things, on the aesthetic resources of the scenography and the objects, which actively participate in the creation of meaning and value.

If we can speak of ritual efficiency, i.e. something that goes beyond the simple technicality of the performance in such a way that something other than the mechanical efficiency of the code is involved, this is due to the aesthetic dimension of the formal aspects of the rite: the visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile and gustatory dimensions of the elements used, in other words the relationship to the body. The sense of beauty is neither anterior nor external to the emotion, but rather an essential player, because it contributes to the density of the ritual experience.

The marks of beauty and magnificence contribute to including the ritual process in a shared pleasure, the dynamic role of which should not be underestimated. These marks are supports of sensitivity which exert a real performativity: a stimulation of desire is reinforced by the use, among other things, of clothes and objects of grace, of nobility, which have the power to please, and to exert a powerful attraction, and even fascination. In a word, beauty shares this grain of emotion without which a rite would not move us, hence the importance of art in this context.

Aesthetic seduction, mixed with other uses of emotion (such as practicing collective gestures and singing together), plays a cohesive and integrating role. This is because emotion, far from locking everyone into their subjectivity, is a way of opening up to the world. As its name suggests (e-motion), it is a movement that makes the person who experiences it more open. Everyone spontaneously seeks to share what charms their relationship with the world, and externalises it through physical manifestations: the nature of wonder is contagious.

The integrating effect of the charm is all the more guaranteed as the markers of the rite form part of the canons of beauty specific to the time, context and region in question. Beauty is culturally based: to be effective, objects must be perceived as beautiful by the actors and witnesses of the place and the time. Not all art objects, and *a fortiori* not all ritual objects, have the potential to take us back to transhistorical and intercultural values and matrices of meaning, although there are exceptions that confirm the rule. It is generally the objects that attract by their force of enigma, which gives them a broad spectrum of resonance.

What are the reasons behind this aesthetic? Preciousness, radiance, ornament, abundance, colour, precision, finesse, expressive force, etc.; these are the aesthetic declensions that contribute to the power of ritual objects and which the pieces exhibited in this section show us. And yet the formal

analogies and the poetry that emanates from the dialogue between the objects gathered here should not lead us to forget that the concerns and effects of this aesthetic are a choice for society that is always particular, and whose understanding requires an approach to singularities.

Atelier DORMAL-PONCE
Dalmatique
Ath, 1730-1740
Soie, fil d'or et d'argent
112 x 104 cm
Trésor de Liège
N° IRPA 10073225
Ancienne abbaye bénédictine Saint-Jacques à Liège

Sumptuously embroidered in gold and silver, the dalmatics from the abbey church of Saint-Jacques in Liège, made in the early eighteenth century, reflect the magnificence of liturgical celebrations at a time when religious sensitivity favoured a theatrical staging of the sacred. Dalmatics are prestigious garments, the vestments of deacons and ministers serving the bishop or priest in major ceremonies. The shimmering of precious materials, obtained through a subtle interplay of textures and colours, the energy and subtle rhythm of ornamental graphics, and the stiff shapes of the garments; all these declensions of luxury were in sharp contrast with the space-time of people, contributing to the creation of a sensorial experience that was different from the everyday world. Radiance is an expression of divine light. Together with the other ornamented artefacts of the Catholic cult (the so-called *ornamenta*), these garments make the sacrality of the place sensitive – they intensify it.

This exceptional treatment places these objects in the sphere of the *extra*-ordinary, the ephemeral and sometimes festive nature of the rite participating fully in the experience of wonder, revelation, and even miracle (understood in its primary sense of what is marvellous to the eye)

Yaka
Masque
République démocratique du Congo, 19e s.
Bois et raphia
65 x 59 x 40 cm
Musée L, N° inv. A564

Many ritual objects were intended to be destroyed after the ritual performance, in accordance with a principle peculiar to this regime of excess that is the festival. This is true in many different cultures. For example, the African ndeemba masks worn during the concluding dances of the *mukanda*, the Yaka puberty and circumcision rituals (see page 87), were intended to be burned or sold after the festival. The shapes and colours of the mask symbolically refer to the fertility of the earth and the cycles of the sun and the moon. The central part of the headdress bore a number of discs indicating the hierarchical position of the young person within the class of initiates. During these festivals of virility that extolled male superiority, only the most gifted initiates in the dance were allowed to wear a mask.

These objects remind us of the transforming powers of the ornament, manifested by its decoration. The ornament does not only make another state or another order visible, but it also makes it effective, it creates it by transforming the social relations established within the rite.

Tableau-reliquaire à paperolles avec saint Sébastien
s.l., s.d.
Bois, verre et papier
26 x 21,5 x 3,3 cm
Musée L, N° inv. BO423
Donation Boyadjian

Vierge à l'Enfant avec parure
Caucase, s.d.
44,2 x 38,6 x 7,4 cm
Musée L, s.n.
Donation Boyadjian

What applies to the body also applies to the images and objects, which are also enhanced by ornament. This is shown by the paperolle reliquary and the image of the Virgin decorated with an ornament of metallic reflections, echoing the practice of covering medieval Byzantine icons with gold or silver ornaments. Ornament embellishes, enhances and honours; it creates an envelope or casing for the image and for fragments of relics. Inexhaustible, the proliferation of ornament tends, even in these two examples, to become the main feature. But it is indeed from this process of reversal between ornamentation and the ornamented – from this excess – that all the expressive power of these objects derives. Ornamental profusion animates inanimate objects, it attracts the eye and contributes to an overload of meaning: it increases the value of the object ornamented, produces an "increase in being" (Gadamer) and an effect of sacrality. Without its decoration, the relic would be no more than a piece of bone. Ornamentation activates the power of the object. Ornamental abundance is produced here with an extreme economy of means, an economy that fully corresponds to the ideal of poverty in the convents where this type of piece was created (see page 43). It is manual labour, invested with devotion, that gives the impression of the richness and preciousness of these pieces that imitate a goldsmith's work with pieces of paper.

© Photo : MRAH, Bruxelles

Thangka, Bouddha et ses disciples
Tibet, 17e s.
Détrempe sur coton
63,5 x 47 cm
Bruxelles, Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire
N° inv. VER.203

In Tibetan *thangka*, all the power of beauty lies in the artist's ability to reproduce the canonical forms and proportions of the various different schools of painting. It is not a question of innovation, but of reproducing centuries-old precepts with the greatest possible accuracy. The surface is prepared and squared with lines, and then painted according to precise prescriptions, provided in collections of iconography, indicating the proportions to be respected, the ornament, the postures and mudra of the deities, etc. The precision and finesse are also the fruit of a religious act that shows the painter's journey on the path to enlightenment. The thangka is a spiritual commitment, the fruit of a long apprenticeship; it is a recitation, an address. The composition is often organised around the central image, an image of a deity that may be framed by secondary deities or other smaller figures, scenes from the lives of the bodhisattvas (sages, enlightened beings); the whole is set in a landscape adorned with lakes, plants, rocks, mountains, flames and clouds, each referring to a commonly shared symbolic universe of Tibetan Buddhism.

© Photo : Michel Wuyts - MAS

***Sitatara*, la Tara blanche**
Tibet, 18e s.
Alliage de cuivre et pigment
40 x 24 x 19 cm
Anvers, Museum aan de Stroom, N° inv. AE.2002.0002.0032
Legs de Jean-Pierre Esman

Eighteenth-century Tibetan bronze sculpture is shown in a white Tara. In the tantra, she reveals herself to be a perfect Buddha in female form. Legend has it that when she was still an “ordinary” princess devoted to the Buddha, monks advised her to pray for rebirth in male form so that she could perfect her qualities and thus achieve enlightenment. But she answered them, “Here there is no man or woman, no self, no person, no consciousness. The labels ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ have no essence, but deceive the world with a warped mind”. She vowed to achieve well-being in a woman’s body. She is the principal feminine deity of compassion, a virtue represented by her seven eyes (face, hands and feet). She is depicted in the graceful features of a young princess, richly dressed and covered with jewels, her hands sketching the gesture of giving (Varadamudra) and the gesture of arguing (Vitarkamudra).

© Photo : J.-M. Vandyck - MRAC Tervuren

Deux masques funéraires kanak en simulation
Photo ancienne, d'origine inconnue

Kanak
Masque funéraire
Nouvelle-Calédonie
Fin 19e s.
Bois, plumes de notou, cheveux, pigments et fibres végétales
154 x 23, 5 x 59 cm
Paris, Musée du Quai Branly
N° inv. 71.1895.15.3

Kanak
Masque funéraire
Nouvelle-Calédonie
Fin 19e s.
Bois gravé avec imprégnation
46,5 x 17 x 20 cm
Tervuren, Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale
N° inv. EO.1979.1.1461

This mask from northern New Caledonia was used during the funeral ritual of mourning for the chief. Considered to be a substitute for the deceased chief, it was activated by a mourner, who, armed with an assegai and a club, threatened members of the paternal clan. It was surmounted by an imposing headdress made up of the hair of the mourners and including a mantle of *notou* feathers (totem). Its grimacing, threatening and frightening appearance was at first considered by Westerners as hideous and ritually diabolical, but it later aroused major interest in its aesthetic qualities; it shows all the perceptive and interpretative subjectivity of what is beautiful. Beyond beauty, the primary intention of Kanak sculptors is to arouse profound emotions in viewers in order to recall the power of the deceased chief, still very much present but as an acting ancestor.

Kanak
Bambou gravé
Nouvelle-Calédonie, 19e s.
131 x 7 cm
Tervuren, Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale
N° inv. EO.1975.68.22

Kanak
Bambou gravé
Nouvelle-Calédonie, 19e s.
143,3 x 5,5 cm
Tervuren, Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale
N° inv. EO.1979.1.1459

Kanak bamboos are decorated with figurative and geometric representations of Kanak rituals and daily activities, accompanied by scenes illustrating the occupation of the settlers. The abstract motifs, long considered as mere decorative geometric forms devoid of meaning, are in reality symbolic representations, which by their typologies and spatial arrangements, narrate scenes of Kanak and colonial life. Under Western influence, figurative motifs, rare in Kanak art, gradually took precedence over geometric motifs. Engraved bamboos were used as memorial supports for great customary events and technical knowledge, as travel sticks with their contents of protective plants or as percussion instruments in ritual dances. **CB, CH and MWD**

Art Deco monstrance

Ostensoir Art Déco
France, 1958
Laiton et cristal de roche
63 x 48 x 24 cm
Musée L, N° inv. E414
Don du Comte Y. du Monceau

The monstrance is a ritual object specific to the Latin rite in the Catholic Church. It has no equivalent in other Christian rites, nor in other religions for that matter. It is the object of “seeing” par excellence. In fact, its name is linked entirely to its function. Its purpose is to show the Eucharistic body of Christ in the form of the host. It is meant to display it (the French word comes from the Latin *ostendere*), just as the adverb ostensibly still expresses today. Rather than seeing, it “shows”, which should be retained as a verb. In German, the object is called a *Monstranz*; while the word *monstrance* was also used in old French.

In the Middle Ages, the faithful no longer took communion (fear of the sacred, the demand for purity, etc.). At the same time, the desire to see the host developed: the elevation was introduced at the moment of consecration during mass. Corpus Christi was instituted in Liège in 1246 – and

then in the whole of the Latin Church – and was extended to include processions of the Blessed Sacrament outside churches in the fourteenth century. The monstrance was born! Later, other Eucharistic processions were held, profoundly marking the western mentality.

Each period saw the expression in art of the desire to highlight the consecrated host, presented for the adoration of the faithful. The Gothic and Baroque monstrances are well known, rivalling in detail and magnificence, an opportunity for goldsmiths to express both their talent and their faith. The production of monstrances declined in the twentieth century. However, the revival of sacred art after the First World War led to the flourishing of art deco buildings and objects down to the 1950s. Art Deco monstrances are generally quite small, with exceptions such as the one from Expo 58.

This exceptional monstrance was made for the Holy See's pavilion at the 1958 World Exhibition in Brussels. It bears witness to the change of epoch, both artistic and socio-political and religious. The Church of Saint Pius X in Petit-Ry (Ottignies) is a reconstruction of the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, with original elements from Expo 58: the crucifix, baptismal font, and large wooden panels from the cathedrals all over the world.

It was produced in the liturgical art workshops of Maurice Cheret (Paris). It is a sun-like monstrance with 93 rays and a golden eight-pointed star. The number eight symbolises the new life received from the risen Christ who appeared on the 1st and 8th days according to the Gospel of John (John 20:26). Another eight-pointed star accentuates the radiant glow. The impression is reinforced by 72 small stones, the same number as the disciples sent out by Jesus (Luke 10:1-24). Thus, the disciples of yesterday and today, who are responsible for proclaiming Christ, are as close to the centre of Christ as possible. The central circle is lined with golden flames. Everything has been thought out to initiate a centrifugal movement, starting from the void which is filled during the liturgical rites. In return, the gaze is drawn to this centre.

There is no need for a lengthy explanatory speech, the ritual object speaks for itself. Placed on an altar, incensed, solemnly carried in a church or in the streets, it expresses the faith of Catholics. The ostentation manifests the closeness of Christ in the midst of his people, a body gathered to worship him. The richness and aesthetic power of the object are placed at the service of the symbolic force of the host, in itself a poor object, insignificant in material terms.

What happens to a monstrance in a museum display case? It is a witness to the creative and artistic genius of past centuries, but not just this. Through the emptiness in its centre, it perhaps expresses a lack. At a time when everything is easily accessible to Westerners, quests for meaning are expressed in force and in all directions, translating the deep uncertainty of each and every one of us, all the way to spiritual roaming. Is the empty monstrance a paradoxical symbol of spirituality in the postmodern West? **AJL**

A familiar rite: marriage

In all cultures, marriage gives rise to ritual festivities to celebrate the union of two beings, and beyond this, of two communities (families, villages, clans...) which are brought into play when the couple commit to a common future. Marriage is a rite of passage, especially for the young girl who changes her condition and name, and leaves her home to enter the young man's circle and find a new identity. The girl is transformed into a woman and envisages the prospect of motherhood and a new family to build up.

As with all rites, the ceremony requires a special moment outside ordinary time, which can range, depending on the civilisation, from a few moments for an official declaration before the local authorities to a whole week of festivities in a large group. It is a matter of temporarily suspending the ordinary flow of life to signify the importance of a moment of reconstruction. A specific place, different from the common space, hosts this moment, whether it is the seat of the civil administration, or a public space prepared for the celebration (decorated, brightened up with songs and music, etc.), or a sanctuary if the wedding takes place by summoning the sacred. Efforts to endow the ceremony with a certain pomp are a sign of the importance of the moment. Sometimes a marriage can degenerate into the enjoyment of appearances while no meaning is added to the event.

It is the ritual staging, with formal determinations presenting recognizable identities, that provides the possibility of symbolising this solemn moment which the participants take part in as signs themselves. As always, the predictability of the ceremonial is accompanied by a degree of unpredictability that leaves room for creativity in order to essentially personalise the rite.

The scenario includes sequences of action identical to any rite of passage (separation from the original environment, preparation, the main event in a specific place, the exit) and the ceremony itself includes at least the welcome, the instituting gesture and the sending off. The main actors enter in procession, clearly marking by their gestures the unusual nature of the moment (the unhurried march signifies solemnity, the singing and music convey emotion, the applause and dancing signify joy, etc.). The key moment is marked by acts of language, because in the rite, speech is performative: it does what it says. The administrative and/or religious authority makes an official declaration and the bride and groom commit themselves to a promise of permanence. Gestures accompany the words: for example, since ancient Roman times in the West, the celebrant has supervised the exchange of rings between the spouses, symbolising their alliance. It also serves to inform others of the civic status of the people wearing it; or the declaration "I declare you joined by the bonds of marriage" is followed by the kiss of the spouses, which makes the bond in question visible. Words are uttered according to the posture, voice and intonation of the solemnity in order to let the assembled community hear significant phrases, and in all cultures where the written word predominates, they are confined to

registers that institutionalise the new situation and preserve its memory. The signature on the texts underlines their identity function.

The rite involves a distribution of roles (husband, wife, ritual celebrant, families, witnesses) defined by positions in space, body postures, gestures, clothing and accessories. Families and witnesses are keen to show the importance of the moment by wearing special clothes; the assembled community may even assign itself a dressing code that distinguishes it, together with the means of transport to get strangers to the celebration. The civil or religious official carries his insignia of authority (which may be extremely imposing or limited to holding the text to be pronounced and the register to be signed). The groom wears not only a ceremonial but also an identity dress (his military garb if such is his function, the colours of his clan, the *hakama* and the *montsuki* adorned with the family coat of arms in Japan...).

At the centre of the rite of passage, the bride wears the most remarkable attributes. Her bridal attire is the object of much care and the dress itself fully contributes to the ritual phase of preparation. In the contemporary western world, the bride wears a white dress, a symbol of virginity, before the wedding, while the groom, significantly, should not see this outfit before the ceremony. Traditionally, she also wears a veil: the Latin word *nuptiae*, which lies behind the French word for wedding, *noce*, comes from *nubere*, meaning “to veil oneself”, a gesture associated with modesty. The groom is allowed to lift this veil for the first kiss.

Maison VALENS
Robe de mariée avec manteau de cour
Belgique, Bruxelles
1970
Soie sauvage, broderie, perles, paillettes, strass et sequins blancs
200 x 600 cm
(manteau déployé)
Bruxelles, Musée Mode & Dentelle
N° inv. C2008.51.01

Bouquet de mariage sous globe en verre
s.l., s.d.
42,7 x 32,2 x 17,1 cm
Musée L
N° inv. BO710
Donation Boyadjian

Jacqueline DEVREUX
Verrine de mariage
Photographie
60 x 50 cm
Prêt de l'artiste

One of the bride's formal attributes is the bouquet. Offered by the young man, it is a symbol of fecundity. The Christian iconography of the Annunciation often shows, besides the lily that adorns the Virgin's room to represent purity, the Angel bringing Mary a flower at the same time as the promise of the child. The bouquet, once the ceremony is over, can be used in two different ways, reflecting two opposing attitudes. The bride, at the end of the feast, throws the bouquet to the group of girls present; tradition has it that whoever catches it will be the next to get married, and in this way, the continuity of the rite, the transmission of the living, the joyful opening to the future is encouraged. The other possibility is for the bouquet, the emblem of marriage, to be dried and kept under a globe, as a permanent reminder of the "most beautiful day in our lives", a tradition encouraged in certain regions of France when the mother or the godmother gives a globe as a gift. This idealized fixation of marriage can become paralysing. This is what contemporary artist Jacqueline Devreux points out, with a glass jar as a metaphor of marriage as possible confinement: over time, the union can prove to be disappointing and imprison a person all his or her life with a partner who is not the right one.

Missel de mariage
Nouvelles heures et prières composées dans le style des manuscrits du XIVe au XVIe siècle, Paris, Gruel et Engelmann, réédition personnalisée de l'édition de 1858
Livre réalisé pour le mariage de Marie de Graindorge d'Orgeville de Ménildurand et Constant de Lesquen du Plessis Casso, le 18 janvier 1898 à Saint-Léger-en-Bray (Oise, France)
Reliure décorée à l'or, dos portant « Heures », tranche dorée marquée de fleurs de lys
Collection privée

From 1850 to 1970, in certain Catholic circles, the bride carried a book together with or instead of the bouquet. This "wedding missal" is a symbolic book-object. Some extremely luxurious copies from the nineteenth century show how marriage is a decisive moment in life. The aesthetic inspiration is neo-Gothic, typical of the romantic fascination of the Middle Ages at that time. The bindings and edges are very neat, since this was what the participants saw. The most precious copies were illuminated or coloured by hand, like the three missals on display, and kept in cases. Other wedding missals were mass-produced, at prices accessible to the greatest possible number of people. Later, these missals were reused by daughters or daughters-in-law, and then by granddaughters. The symbolism changes. It no longer represents the marriage of a couple, but the identity of a family line.

Photographs are essential to bear witness to the use of this ritual companion of the bride over a period of a hundred years. Let us follow the journeys of the missal of Marie de Ménildurand, made for her marriage to Count Constant de Lesquen du Plessis Casso in 1898. In later generations, the missal was carried by at least her daughters-in-law Mercédès (1932) and Anne-Marie (1935), by her granddaughters Chantal (1962) and Viviane (1963), and her great-granddaughter Marielle (1988).

Photos anciennes du missel de Marie de Ménildurand utilisé de génération en génération
Collection privée

The origin of this rite is not known. Offering the bride a Book of Hours has been an established practice since the Middle Ages. Carrying it symbolically in marriage in the nineteenth century brought the bride closer to the Virgin Mary. Ritually taking up the pictorial motif of the Virgin in the book at the Annunciation, the bride should be pure and a virgin like Mary, receiving her fecundity from God. She is prayerful, she reads the psalms, and will be a good mother like Mary. The programme of a holy bride is thus all laid out. The rite disappeared in the late 1960s, thanks to the reform of the Catholic marriage liturgy in 1969, and above all to the changing role of women in couples and in society.

Different types of art are therefore called upon at weddings: the sacred arts (objects and ornaments of worship) in the context of a religious wedding, and in all cases, the arts of speech, music and gesture, adornment (clothing, hairstyles, jewellery) and all forms of ornamental art (floral, bookish, decorative) or good cheer (drinking, eating), to contribute to involving all the bodily senses in the emotion of this universal rite of passage.

AJL and MWD

The museum: a new ritual context for objects

Photo A.-M. Vüllemenot, 2010

Photo C. Heering, 2021

Étagère de rangement des livres de mantras
Ladakh, Monastère de Lamayuru

Chasublier
Sacristie de la cathédrale Notre-Dame de Tournai

Since it is context that determines the rite, it is understandable that objects, by forming part of a museum, undergo a change in use, since they now participate in a ritual of a different nature.

Indeed, as soon as they are exhibited in a museum setting, objects are no longer the actors, but the witnesses of a cultural heritage, placed at the centre of an intellectual curiosity that the museum endeavours to stimulate by means of devices for connecting with the public: explanatory labels and videos, commented itineraries, creative animations, etc.

However, this change in status is not problem-free, for can we unhesitatingly decide that the original ritual function is over, once the object has been exhibited in the museum as an ethnographic witness? Should a museum be a neutral space where visitors have the right to disregard the religious precepts attached to the objects on display, or should we accept that what is sacred to some becomes sacred to all, with its restrictions and prohibitions? Example: tjurunga, sacred objects of the Australian Aborigines, can only be seen and handled in their original context by men who have been initiated. Even seeing them is strictly forbidden to women. How then can they be placed in a showcase?

Not to mention the fact that certain ritual uses are strictly forbidden. For example: how can a damaged mask, which has survived a ritual destruction in a primitive society, be displayed when its destiny is precisely to disappear? And can it, in its degraded appearance, isolated in the silence and immobility of its showcase, bear witness to the emotional effects produced by the frenetic and colourful dance organised around its initial magnificence, which gave the ritual actors a sense of the transcendent?

One thing is certain: putting objects in a museum context gives them an exceptional status, since only what is rare and precious is worthy of inclusion in a museum. The objects are therefore treated with the care required by their extraordinary nature: placed on pedestals and in display units, under globes and in showcases, hung against colourful backgrounds, surrounded by light, placed to be seen from their best angles. At the same time, they are protected from unwanted handling by glass walls, cords, drawers, screens, and even audible alarms that warn people if the correct distance to keep is not respected. The museum object enters into an exclusive rite of contemplation. We can – but not always – reproduce the image (drawing it, possibly photographing it with the usual precautions), but the way it is exhibited clearly signifies

Cœur aux intentions dans une vitrine du Musée L

its status as an untouchable original. In the case of ritual objects, this may involve a radical reconversion if the object was originally active only when it was handled. Example: the mask which is only effective when worn by a celebrant and integrated into a ritual gesture.

More specifically, the aesthetic approach is a major constant in museum work. Through the quality of the lighting and the presentation case, as well as through the strictly formal assemblages of the objects, the museum invites you to consider objects in their aesthetic characteristics and let the charm they exude take effect. The absence of explanatory labels within a “curiosity cabinet” or a collection may thus be intentional, aiming to leave each person face to face with the object with his own personal sensitivity in order to be able to understand it as a work of art. Example: the Delsemme collection at Musée L in Louvain-la-Neuve, which brings together pieces from a wide variety of times and places, and the collection of hearts from folk art assembled by the cardiologist Noubar Boyadjian. The curiosity cabinet or private collection is in itself enough to intensify the viewing of the intrinsic formal qualities of the objects. The reception of these elements, including folk art, within a museum institution helps to legitimise them in terms of their artistic value, and to modify the way in which they are seen.

Christ en croix au 4e étage du Musée L

Any object placed in a museum context is thus taken up in ritual uses, even if the public is not necessarily aware of them, even when they themselves fetishize the work of art in the context of its museum presentation. Example: selfies in front of the Mona Lisa. The museum can raise awareness of these issues through animations that invite the visitor to become aware of the rituals specific to the objects' context of origin. For example: should we dare to touch an object of Christian worship reserved for the priest, or a mortuary statue? The museum also invites people to become aware of the ritualised practices specific to the museum context itself. For example: allowing the public to enter the storerooms of a museum where they can discover the behind-the-scenes conservation of masterpieces, authorising them to leaf through old illuminated books carefully and with gloves on, and witnessing the restoration of a work of art according to both scientific and aesthetic criteria.

In short, the museum plays a key role in teaching us how to observe. It tries to guide the public in the way they understand objects that have been uprooted from their ritual context and have gained a new, ritualised setting. The museum raises awareness of the active presence of rituals that mark out daily life and their ongoing interference with the sphere of art. It shows how rituality is an anthropological constant that affects all eras and all regions in the world, and in which everyone is invited to be an actor. In short, no rite is totally foreign to art, and no art is free of rituality. Rite and art combine their forces to allow humanity to be itself, that is to say, a living species that attempts to give its experience a meaning rooted in its beliefs and imagination, in order to blossom on a different level of reality. **MWD**

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Mentions s.l., s.d., s.n. in the captions mean that the object has no place of origin, no date or no inventory number attributed to date.

What do the textiles, sculptures, jewels, masks, amulets, musical instruments, censers and prayer books in our museums tell us? How should we understand the uses and ways of life associated with these objects now they have been removed from their original context and put under the microscope in elaborate museum settings? **Although their status has shifted from objects of worship to cultural objects they were all, at one time, used in ritual practices** involving beliefs, gestures, words, sounds and smells. All of these elements are part of a set of actions that endow the objects with meaning within a circumscribed space and time, and a particular society.

Art & Rite reveals the beauty and strangeness of these objects which bear witness to the ritual and artistic creativity of human beings. Bringing different cultures into conversation, these objects tell the **story of the ritual practices of humanity**. But the publication also interrogates **the loss of meaning brought about by "embalming" in a museum** and observes a **new process of ritualization or re-sacralization** through their re-contextualization in a museum environment.

This catalogue, coordinated by **Caroline Heering** and **Anne-Marie Vuillemenot** who commissioned the ***Art & Rite. The power of objects*** exhibition, also provides a wider platform for the results of the inter-disciplinary works carried out in the framework of the «Teaching and research at the heart of the Museum-laboratory» project (Louvain 2020 – UCLouvain).

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