

## DEMONIC BESTIARY OF MAKONDE IN THE PERCEPTION OF WARSAW RESPONDENTS

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### *Демонічний бестіарій народу маконде в сприйнятті варшавських респондентів*

**Зофія Граляк**

*Метою дослідження є вивчення особливостей сприйняття сучасними мешканцями Варшави скульптур народу маконде. Дослідження здійснене завдяки підтримці РТАfr та гостинності Варшавської публічної бібліотеки 16-19 та 24 січня 2018 р. під час виставки «Między sztuką a orętaniet. Hebanowe bestiarium ludu Makonde. Fotografie Piotra Sadurskiego» [Між мистецтвом та володінням. Ебеновий бестіарій народу маконде Between Art and Possession. Ebony bestiary of Makonde people. Piotr Sadurski Photography]. Під час експозиції скульптури з колекції Еви та Євгеніуша Ржевуських були включені у художній діалог з фотографіями Піотра Садурського. Усі експоновані роботи були виконані переважно у стилі шетані, який пов'язаний із зображеннями демонів. Скульптури маконде становлять приклад сучасного мистецтва Східної Африки. Їхнє коріння сягає місцевих традицій та вірувань. Скульптори маконде походять з Мозамбіку, але через складну соціальну ситуацію у цій країні багато хто з них мусив залишити батьківщину. Вони знайшли безпеку у Танзанії, де проживає значна частина народу маконде й до сьогодні творять у місцевості Дар Ес Салаам. Виставка включала скульптури найвидатніших представників цієї традиції. В межах дослідження респонденти, які відвідували експозицію, отримували дві фотографії, створених у різних стилях: кьяроскуро в одному випадку та формальному – в іншому. Головною метою було простежити шляхи сприйняття скульптур маконде, суттєво відмінних у культурному відношенні, відвідувачами виставки у Варшаві.*

*Ключові слова: сприйняття, Східна Африка, маконде, сучасне мистецтво Танзанії.*

In 1955, Erwin Panofsky divided all man-made objects into two classes: works of art perceived through the prism of aesthetics and practical objects, which do not have to be perceived in this way. The latter was, in turn, divided into two types: means of communication and tools and instruments. All man-made objects have some specific intention, and therefore they are created for a purpose. However, according to Panofsky works of art evoke aesthetic experiences. The boundary separating practical objects from works of art is the intention originating from purposefulness of intentions and actions undertaken by the creator (Panofsky 1955, pp. 11-12).

If, according to Douglas Fraser, we assume that the purpose of the creator of “primitive art” is solely to satisfy the needs of the community in the symbolic sphere, not to awaken aesthetic experience, we consequently need to agree that objects created by a primitive man are not works of art, but, at best, functional items.

Contemporary theoreticians of post-structuralism and postmodernism, such as Michel Foucault, Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster, Craig Owens, and Pierre Bourdieu, pay attention to the fact that the use of such concepts as art or civilization is a product of culture itself. Thus, the attempt to define them automatically becomes a form of using knowledge as a tool of power and domination (D'Alleva 2008, p. 158). Looking at the history of collecting, considered through the prism of

collections of primitive art, we can notice that the criterion for evaluation of such art is very often dictated by collector's aesthetic taste. Structuralists and poststructuralists also argued that the concept of authorship combined with the idea of individual genius and expression determining creation of a work of art can be defined as a cultural creation that has been given to the society in a peculiar heritage, starting from the preferences of Renaissance collectors (D'Alleva, 2008, p. 158).

### **Cultural differences versus aesthetic experience**

Moving on the ground of aesthetic experience, we should look at the phenomenon of aesthetics. According to Władysław Tatarkiewicz: "Aesthetics used to be defined as a beauty theory, but in conviction that the notion of beauty is indeterminate and vague and therefore cannot be taught, aestheticians followed the path of art, define aesthetics as an art theory. And others want to deal with both beauty and art; they separate the two branches and practise both of them." (Tatarkiewicz 2004, p. 29).

A term "aesthetics" has a very complex meaning. It can be understood, among others, as a philosophy of aesthetic phenomena, such as values, quality or experience. It can be also understood as a philosophy of art. In this context, it will concern a work of art, its creator, recipient and also a reception method. While the concept of metacritics is philosophy referring to broadly understood artistic critique. Aesthetics may also be understood as a phenomenon that combines all the features listed here (Dziemidok 2002, p. 17). The aesthetics understood in this way constitute the broadest spectrum of interpretations for this concept.

In analyses of aesthetic experiences, more and more attention is paid to reception of culturally different objects. So the question arises whether recipients who are different in terms of location on the cultural map can demonstrate appropriate threshold of sensitivity to the art of "the others". To do this, it would be the most appropriate to put European, African, Oriental or Japanese art on the same plane. Here the art would be understood in the same way: as a collection of creations that arouse aesthetic experience. There is still an open debate on this issue. Some researchers are in favour of equal treatment of all forms of art, others state that such an approach is absurd. The debate of 1993 on aesthetics as an intercultural category seems to be interesting in light of the above-mentioned issue. It was participated by such eminent individuals as Howard Morphy, Joanna Overing, Jeremy Cote or Peter Gow (Wilkożewska 2004, pp. 8-9). According to the Australian aesthetician, Morphy, aesthetics is an intercultural category, which takes place within qualitative effects, i.e. it directly affects the problem of stimuli to which human senses react. Naturally, experiences can and should be different in every culture, which results even from a different cultural code, a level of development, upbringing or socialization of a given community. Regardless of the aforementioned aspects, it is hard to deny similarities which all citizens of the world demonstrate in the field of aesthetic experiences to neurophysiological stimuli. However, it should be borne in mind that what some people find pleasant, others may find revolting (Ingold 1996, p. 258). It is worth noting that aesthetics as a theory refers to a wide spectrum of issues regarding experiences, their perception and their impact on human life. "Aesthetics give access to the experience of spiritual strength, to the feeling of being in the presence of authority or, more pleasurably, makes it possible to understand why some people buy a special kind of soap." (Ingold 1996, p. 259). It can be assumed that human existence, from the day of birth to the moment of death, is constantly accompanied by various stimuli, whose transformation into aesthetic quality may lead to an aesthetic experience.

It is no coincidence that in Africa we find the first rock paintings, ornamental utility vessels or figurines depicting people and animals. In the African tradition, unity of man and nature is deeply rooted, which undeniably makes it possible to create optimal conditions for contemplation of

beauty. Presumably, when studying African art, we refer to the beginnings of humanity seen through the eyes of anthropologists (Theile 1974, p. 9). Therefore, it can be assumed that African aesthetics refers to the artistic thoughts of man, which constituted the need to show his own expression, as well as the way of understanding and interpreting the world around him. Although aesthetics as a science has been developing in Europe since the eighteenth century (Kozak 2013), research on art and creative thought of the Black Continent began, in fact, only at the beginning of the twentieth century. So what influenced this significant time discrepancy of research conducted in this field in relation to Europe? Certainly, a “non-classical” nature of African art is of great importance here. A great role was also played by diversity of concepts associated under its common name. As a continent, Africa is three times as big as Europe. The above-mentioned complexity resulting from i.a. its vast surface determines diversity. It is also associated with many ways of interpreting the surrounding reality, which we can observe on the example of diverse African culture. However, presumably the first reflection on African art from the European point of view can be found among the colonizers who penetrated these areas, having contact with regional art at the courts of black rulers. Probably it was thanks to the travellers and colonizers that the first masks or sculptures reached Europe, thus becoming a milestone in further development of research on African aesthetics. This phenomenon, along with development of the market and collecting resulted in displays of exhibits in many museums in the world available for the public (Kelly 1998, p. 38). Reflecting on African art and aesthetics, we must mention the colonial perspective, which for obvious reasons was devoid of objectivity. African art considered in this way was stigmatized as primitive, understood rather as curiosity: an interesting object which should be searched in a museum of curiosities - Wunderkammer, rather than in a museum of art (Pawłowska 2008, p. 204).

### The Makonde people

Despite its indigenous values, activity of artists from the Makonde tribe is expression of the contemporary art of Tanzania. Makonde sculpture has evolved under the influence of European visitors, thanks to which it combines both commercial and artistic values. Undeniably, nowadays the works of many sculptors of this trend are works of art that can satisfy the needs of recipients of contemporary art with the most refined taste. This sculpture is an extremely broad concept, within which many different styles and tendencies have developed.

The Makonde people are among those only recently met by the white man. For a long time, they lived in complete isolation. That is why they were affected by all external influences that could somehow change the perspective of created works relatively late. As a result of many social unrest at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Makonde were forced to emigrate from Western Mozambique. Many Makonde people found a safe haven in Tanzania, where they have lived and created to this day.

For Makonde, like for all tribes in the Bantu group, the most important rite is circumcision<sup>1</sup>. This is an annual event introducing young members of the tribe into adult life. The most important element of the whole ritual is initiation called *Unyago*, when a young Makonde becomes a child of the whole tribe. Small sculptures play a very important role in this whole process. They constitute a specific visual instruction depicting the roles that young adepts will perform when they enter adulthood (Kirkneas & Korn, 1999). The highlight of the ritual is a dance called *mapiko*. A dancer usually hides the body under a long robe and his face is covered by a helmet mask. Very often the dance is performed on stilts (Mohl 1974, p. 8). The ritual is intended to scare demons out of the village. For women, this is the only way to see a *mapiko* mask, which would not be available to them

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<sup>1</sup> Both boys and girls are circumcised.

in normal circumstances. For example, even finding a *mpolo* (a special tent in which they were stored) could end up in death for women, who could only see masks during rituals. Not only the final appearance of masks, but also the whole process of their creation constitutes a secret. A sculptor who made the mask was a person, distinguished against the rest of the society and endowed with privileges. Indigenous Makonde very often evoked fear. They were described as a community eating rats, snakes and people. Even their appearance caused anxiety. Characteristic elements decorating the body of this tribe include, among others, a convex skin tattoo or so-called scarification, most often covering the face and belly, or sharply sawed teeth and padlocks called *ndonya*, characteristic of women (Wisniewska 2013, p. 15).

Belief in interdependence of the mundane and extraterrestrial world is characteristic of almost the whole Africa. Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a significant part of Africans are Muslims or Christians, but indigenous values are still intertwined with faith in religious dogma. Also today, Makonde believe that the dead can affect their lives and maintaining good relationships with ancestor spirits can positively affect their lives. In turn, sculptures played a paramount role in the process of maintaining correctness of the said relations, because they symbolically constituted personification of the ancestors to which the tribe members directly addressed. Makonde believe that spirits can penetrate into inanimate things, giving them special power, turning an ordinary object into an intermediary between the world of the living and the dead (Wisniewska 2013, p. 15). The function that the sculpture has is best described by the role it plays in the legend of the first Makonde, according to which the first human being in the world was a hunter. Unable to endure loneliness, he carved a wooden woman, who came to live and fell in love with her creator, which resulted in birth of the first Makonde. The Foremother is still worshiped and is one of the most important sculptural motifs of this tribe.

### The sculpture of Makonde artists

The term “Makonde sculpture” refers to a wide range of artists, creating in many different styles, whose common feature is usually a high artistic level of produced works. This type of works is often made only as a product of the tourist market, therefore this term may refer both to very high-class sculptures and small-value works representing the so-called *airport art*.

Due to broadness of styles and trends in which Makonde sculptors create their works, for objective reasons this paper will mention of only two of them, recognition of which is important for better understanding of interpretive and cognitive ways presented by Warsaw society later in this text.

The first to be mentioned is the *shetani* style, whose world is very ambiguous and mysterious. Makonde believe that the world is divided into three parallel realities:

- *Kunnunge*, or Heaven, inhabited by the God.
- *Pachilambo*, or the Earth, inhabited by human beings
- *Kumahoka*, or the zone inhabited by extraterrestrial beings, the world of ghosts (Kirkneas & Korn, 1999, s. 40).

The latter world is the most mysterious and filled with fear. There are a whole pantheon of deities, demons and spirits, living near human homes. These creatures may have a diverse attitude towards people. Sometimes they are friendly, in other times they spread plague or cause defeat. In Makonde beliefs, there are a number of old stories told from generation to generation, in which *shetani*<sup>1</sup> play a huge role. These creatures are semi-humans, semi-animals or have extraterrestrial features; they often constitute a mixture of diverse beings. Their significance for Makonde is

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<sup>1</sup> A word *shetani* means „a being”.

enormous, since very often stories about them have a moralizing overtone. According to Makonde, all aspects of their lives are influenced by good and evil spirits that can shape their lives. Of course, in opposition to good energies, there are also bad ones, whose most important representative is *Nandenga*. This is the most powerful demon in the pantheon of the Makonde deities. Makonde believe that it can bring madness, death or plague. It is referred to by adults to threaten their children. Allegedly it can suddenly appear like the wind, and its arrival is always accompanied by unexpected circumstances. Some *shetani* are spirits responsible for particular areas, for example there are beings that make life difficult for only women or children. A daemon called *Mbegua* brings misfortune to everyone it meets, while *Ngenge* kidnaps small children but never harms adults. Due to awareness of continuous coexistence with these dark powers, Makonde have many moralistic stories aimed at sensitizing tribal members to the principles inherent in these peculiar relationships. Oral histories indicate, for example, where you can and where you should not go at certain times, how to avoid *shetani's* anger or how to warn children against them. Telling legends or making sculptures is an effective way for Makonde to remove fear against *shetani* (Kirkneas & Korn, 1999, p. 40).

The first Makonde who made this type of sculptures was Samaki Likankow, coming from Mozambique, who came to Tanzania in 1930. Stylistics of his sculpture deviated from all commonly known realizations. It was very dynamic and full of expression.

Since then, *shetani* sculptures have quickly gained recognition and popularity, especially among foreign buyers. Initially they had small dimensions – about 20-30 cm in height. This trend has features previously not observed in Makonde works: grotesqueness, deformation, asymmetry and a deviation from proportions. The sculptures sometimes corresponded to oral histories about a given creature or were an expression of the artist's imagination. Works from the 1950s and 1960s most often depicted individual creatures with large heads and deformed bodies. They were often characterized by accidental distribution of face parts. The figures were supposed to be frightening. Sometimes they had some attributes characteristic for particular creatures, for example a cane.

Thanks to the *shetani* style, Makonde could for the first time demonstrate an individual artistic approach, which undoubtedly proved their sculptural skills, thus raising their work to the status of works of art.

The *ujamaa* style is another one to be mentioned here. It originated in the mid-1960s in Dar es Salaam, not long after the Makonde sculptors began to sculpt in the *shetani* style. The first sculpture of this type was created by Roberto Yakobo. Originally, these sculptures were called *dimongo*, which in the Makonde language means strength. Development of this style enabled artists to move towards a completely different convention. Its characteristic feature is totemic representation of figures, stacked one on another in such a way that the whole composition resembles a human tower. The very word *ujamaa* in Swahili means community, in the sense of a commune. Its direct translation corresponds to the Polish word “together” (Wisniewska 2013, p. 50). Character of the style refers to the memory of the ancestors, it is a kind of family tree. Works of this type most often refer to indigenous values and also emphasize tribal traditions.

### **Purpose, research group, research methods and its course**

The main purpose of this paper is to try to outline a variety of interpretative paths presented by Warsaw respondents when entering a lively dialogue with the sculptures of Makonde artists. An important issue was also to try to demonstrate aesthetic experiences or lack of them.

Figure No. 1. Table presenting the basic data of the respondents taking part in the research

Ordinal number	sex	age	profession	education	Ordinal number	sex	age	profession	education
1	F	24	seamstress	secondary	11	M	40	engineer	higher
2	M	28	artist	higher	12	M	35	hairdresser	secondary
3	M	55	office employee	higher	13	F	76	landscape architect	higher
4	M	40	library employee	higher	14	F	30	makeup artist	secondary
5	M	29	call-center employee	secondary					
6	F	18	schoolgirl	secondary					
7	M	44	teacher	higher					
8	F	30	writer	higher					
9	F	20	student	secondary					
10	33	33	engineer	higher					

### Research group

Individuals participating in the research were selected among visitors of the exhibition *“Między sztuką a opętaniem. Hebanowe bestiarium ludu Makonde. Fotografie Piotra Sadurskiego”* [Between Art and Possession. Ebony bestiary of Makonde people. Piotr Sadurski Photography], which was held in the Public Library of the Capital City of Warsaw, at Koszykowa 26/28. (St. Kierbedziow building). The research covered both respondents deliberately visiting the exhibition and those who came to the library by accident.<sup>1</sup>

The researched population consisted of people between 18 and 76 years of age. The respondents had a different level of education. Whereby the majority had a university degree, one of the respondents was an anthropology doctor. The research covered both women and men.

### Adopted methodology

From the methodological perspective, the project was inspired by various techniques, which by definition are not typical for conducting art research. Methodological diversity of adopted techniques contributing to creation of this research is of great significance. The methodological basis for the research was the procedure according to the humanistic coefficient, i.e. the so-called Florian Znaniecki's rule. It assumes that the cultural world should be treated as a world of values, not objects. Therefore, empirical facts should be determined in the way in which they are perceived by individuals. This methodological attitude allows for recognition of the recipient's attitude towards the research subject: in this case, Makonde sculptures. An important aspect of the idea of the humanistic coefficient is relationship between the research subject – the respondent and the researcher. In other words, the researcher in their analyses should take into account what given works may mean to the respondents. They should also attempt to understand presented interpretations, taking into account empirical facts having direct impact on them. In this context, the humanistic coefficient means a feature common for all human and social products, including

<sup>1</sup> Some respondents who did not know what event was taking place there noticed the exhibition, noticed the exhibition and, being interested in its topic, decided to watch it and take part in the research.

works of art. These objects, for various reasons, can be considered valuable enough to subject them to a broader interpretation or analysis. According to Florian Znaniecki, “a picture is chaos of colourful patches on canvas,” and it is given the meaning by the humanistic coefficient.

Qualitative information was important for the obtained results. As it is commonly known, this type of research is aimed at collecting material that has not been artificially created. Its main purpose is to organize the surrounding world, thanks to which we can observe to a greater extent how people live and what world they create around them (Steinar 2010, p. 11).

It is very important to take into account the context of human behaviour, emotions or feelings. An important deciding factor, sometimes deciding about validity of qualitative research, is an attempt to interpret the phenomena seen through the prism of interaction, based of which the research hypotheses are confirmed or denied.

The conducted research used the technique of a directed interview by Steinar Kvale. Such an interview is conducted with an emphasis on full understanding of specific goals, which are reflected in the research questions. Another important factor is formulation of sentences in a manner understandable to all participating respondents. Naturally, taking into account the fact that a language can and even should be modified depending on the level of the interlocutor. During the interview, the researchers remained sensitive to the words of the respondents, remembering the given facts, thanks to which it became possible to report them “live” and analyse them with the cognitive distance appropriate for the conducted research. According to these assumptions, the researcher conducts preliminary analysis of individual statements as early as during the interview.

The analysis also referred to the techniques of David Silverman or Anna Matuchniak-Krasuska. The methodology of the research is also based on experimental aesthetics – Gustav Theodor Fechner (Fechner 1876), as well as experimental psychology – Daniel Ellis Berlyne (Berlyne 1976, pp. 43-55).

The concepts mentioned here, as well as many others, contributed to creation of a project being the subject of this paper and provided the language necessary to describe it.

The essential element for understanding the meaning of the project is to outline subjective determinants such as “who saw what, in what conditions?”. And the most important problem is to describe and systematize particular interpretations of sculptures, taking into consideration social and cultural code different for Warsaw respondents and works of art in East Africa. The issues raised during the research also concerned the perceived values, aesthetic preferences, taste and aesthetic disposition.<sup>1</sup>

A manner of perceiving sculptures of Makonde artists imposes a question about the attitude of recipients towards African art, as well as the functions of this art towards the recipients.

Respondents visiting the library after seeing the exhibition, where they could interact with real objects, were presented photographs. The presented photographs showed sculptures in two different styles: an artistic one in the *chiaroscuro* convention (in this case, black sculpture against a black background<sup>2</sup>) by Piotr Sadurski, and more formal – a black sculpture against a white background. The respondents were also presented photographs showing selected details of

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<sup>1</sup> The aesthetic disposition is readiness to aesthetic experience, resulting from the recipient's sensitivity to art. During perception of works of art, it is characterized by aesthetic and not merely practical dependence. This attitude will be visible in some of the respondents taking part in the research. One of the respondents, a man of about 35 years of age, a hairdresser, claimed that “watching this type of art gives me pleasure comparable to being in nature.” Linking artistic competence with aesthetic disposition of the recipient in situ can also be an interesting issue.

<sup>2</sup> *Chiaroscuro* - (from Italian *Chirao* means - light, and *scuro* - dark) the term is used when stylistics of a given work emphasizes clear differences in the intensity of light and shadow, resulting in a clearer impression of three-dimensionality. During the Warsaw research in photographs by Piotr Sadurski, *chiaroscuro* was used in the convention of a black sculpture against a black background.

individual sculptures. All the photographs used the research were assigned numbers. The research had the character of a directed interview in which, during seemingly casual conversation, specific questions were asked. In such a situation, the issues raised during the interview, as well as its entire course, depended on spontaneous development of the conversation. Each time during the research some framework questions were asked:

1. What do you think about this work?
2. What kind of emotions (if any) accompany reception of this work?
3. What do you think the author wanted to express through this sculpture?
4. Do you have any memories that revive during contact with the presented work?
5. Would you like to have such art at home?
6. How do you understand a devil, an imp, a demon for you?
7. Why did you want to visit the exhibition?
8. Do the works of Makonde artists correspond with your ideas about African sculpture?

Additionally, if a fragment of the photograph was particularly interested, it could be marked with a marker on the foil applied to the photograph in question. This method enabled the most precise determination of interesting threads in individual works, as well as location of sculptures in the widest possible context.

Despite many interwoven methodological threads, the research was characterized by minimalism and simplicity. It was a nice way to spend time. In addition, all respondents unanimously claimed that participation in the research arranged experiences and thoughts stemming from perception of works presented in cabinets.

Since the research had the character of a free-form interview, as already indicated, the conversation could each time be shaped in a different way, depending on the circumstances. It was possible to terminate it at any time, without detriment to the qualitative end results.

### **Research course**

The interviews revealed facts confirming existence of aesthetic experience. The experiences created as a result of perception had a real dimension here. Watching the works evoked keen interest in individuals. Some people clearly contemplated sculptures, devoting a lot of time to their analysis.

In total, 14 directed interviews were conducted. An additional element arranging interpretation of particular fragments of the sculptures was the empirical method - consisting in marking on the photos the most powerful elements affecting the recipient, and then analysis of feelings by the respondents. The time span of interviews varied significantly. The shortest took 38 minutes and the longest – 2 hours and 50 minutes.

It should be noted that Makonde artists do not give titles to their works. The titles that were presented at the exhibition were given by the collectors - Ewa and Eugeniusz Rzewuski.<sup>1</sup> During the research, the respondents were presented photographs devoid of any explanation or signature. These photographs were only assigned a number given by the author of this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> It was clearly marked on one of the boards with appropriate annotations, thanks to which the visitors to the exhibition could broaden their knowledge with an additional context. In connection with the above, titles of the sculptures were given more on the basis of interesting collector's insights. It should be noted that titles of the sculptures during the exhibition were not presented in an imposing or suggestive manner.





Figure No. 2. Photos used in the research (from No. 1 to No. 5)

**Analysis of the selected works:**

**Sculpture No. 1. Unknown author, *shetani*, Tanzania, 1999, *Child stealer*, formal convention (own photograph)**

The interpretation of this sculpture took two directions. Some research participants had positive and some negative feelings. Most often, however, reception of the sculpture made the respondents smile and triggered a number of positive associations and memories. Sometimes perception of the work can be described as a kind of *Biblia pauperum*, since, according to the

participants, it has a moralizing nature. A good example is a 45-year-old woman: “I think this little devil caught a child who had been disobedient and now drags him into his den to give him the punishment he deserves.” Another opinion referred to the message, which, according to a 35-year-old respondent, is carried by the above-mentioned sculpture No. 1. The respondent stated: “I think that this work may have a second bottom. There is something very disturbing in the eyes of this creature. Its seemingly friendly, honest eyes show signs of paranoia or even possession. I am afraid to think what it will do to this child when they are alone. It may even eat him. Perhaps such a figure serves the cult and summoning some dark powers, such as devils or demons, in order to make a pact with them in exchange for the soul.” Naturally, the statement was a kind of joke, because the interviewer started to laugh after saying it. Another controversial opinion about the work was made by a man aged around 55, who thought that “it looks as if this creature was about to initiate sexual intercourse with the creature being held by the neck”. Of course, apart from the specific receptions presented above, a large number of respondents stated that this work only raised positive connotations. There were opinions, such as the one of an 18-year-old woman: “what a nice devil” or a man aged 40 : “it arouses positive emotions in me”. It is also worth mentioning that a group of respondents defined their attitude to this work as neutral and devoid of any emotions.

**Sculpture No. 2. Atanasio Fokasi, *shetani*, Mozambique, 1983, *Yoga*, formal convention (own photographs)**

This work aroused a number of ambiguous observations. A large part of the respondents saw scary beasts in this sculpture. Some of the respondents divided the sculpture into individual fragments, suggesting that the creature consists of several entities connected together in one body. Most often, however, this division was limited to indicating an image of a monster, animal or family. As an example, we can recall a statement of a 33-year-old woman who, in the aforementioned photograph outlined three human figures, which, in her opinion, depicted a father who formed the basis of the family (below) and a mother holding a child above. Depending on the selected reception method, there were different interpretations of this work, which, interestingly, sometimes appeared in perception of the same respondent. It can be said that the longer a person looked at the work, the more cognitive layers they found in themselves. We can see this on the example of very different ways of interpretation manifested by a woman aged 76. At first, in the sculpture she saw a woman, probably a mum, but after re-establishing the relationship with the real exhibit displayed in the cabinet, the woman said that the piece of this work seemed to be “a malignant and

clever animal” or a rat. Then the same person pointed out that the upper part of the sculpture reminded her of a bundle or a basket, which was associated with African women who carried heavy objects in a similar way. Another noteworthy observation of a man aged 44 was connection of the fragment discussed above with the crown, which was associated with the crown of Upper Egypt once worn by the pharaohs. The sculpture No. 2 also brought many associations referring to gymnastics and acrobatics, as well as yoga. One woman about 30 years old, said: “I associate this sculpture with yoga and meditation, as well as an astral trip, during which you can meet such creatures.” It should be noted that this woman has been practicing yoga for a long time as an expression of spiritual activity. Another respondent aged about 30, said: “I associate this work with sexuality and femininity.” Another opinion was expressed in the statement of a 29-year-old man who would like to have this sculpture at home. As he claimed, “this work arouses such a strong erotic feeling in me that I would like to lick it.”



Figure No. 3. A set of drawings on the film placed on photographs taken by the respondents during the research

**Sculptures No. 3 and 4. Author unknown, *shetani*, Tanzania, 1998, *Medusa*, *chiaroscuro* convention (photo by Piotr Sadurski) + formal convention (own photograph)**

The analysis of this sculpture oscillated within three main associations: a man/child, a cross and scream. One respondent aged 33 saw in it a reference to the Christ's cross, which she could even precisely mark. Another respondent aged 35 was particularly interested in a delicate scratch (barely visible during real contact with work) probably resulting from the wood grain system. According to the respondent, it looked like a cross, which “is a symbol of suffering.” In turn, a 76-year-old woman saw in this work “a child climbing up on his toes, probably trying to reach something.” The feelings of fear and horror were common among the respondents. What is particularly interesting, a much larger number of respondents associated a sculpture photographed in a formal convention with scream. It should be noted, however, that in case of photographs of the same sculpture in different conventions, such as, inter alia, works no. 3 and 4, there was a group of people who experienced the *chiaroscuro* convention stronger. For some individuals this change in the style of sculpture presentation was insignificant. Work no. 4, apart from frequent association with a screaming face, was associated by one respondent aged about 35 with “a spiky, horned demon who, attacking its victim, drives her to madness”, expression of which was scream. A 33-year-old female respondent saw in the sculpture a human figure, depicted during escape from the grotto, or a rock crevice. Perception of sculpture no. 4 caused many associations related to typical utility objects. Some respondents saw a ring, the others – a ship rudder, and a man aged 35 said: “A form of the presented sculpture brings in mind a kind of amulet that should provide its owner with vital forces, as indicated by highlighting body parts responsible for senses, such as nose-smelling, eye-sight, mouth-taste or speech, and leg-movement.”

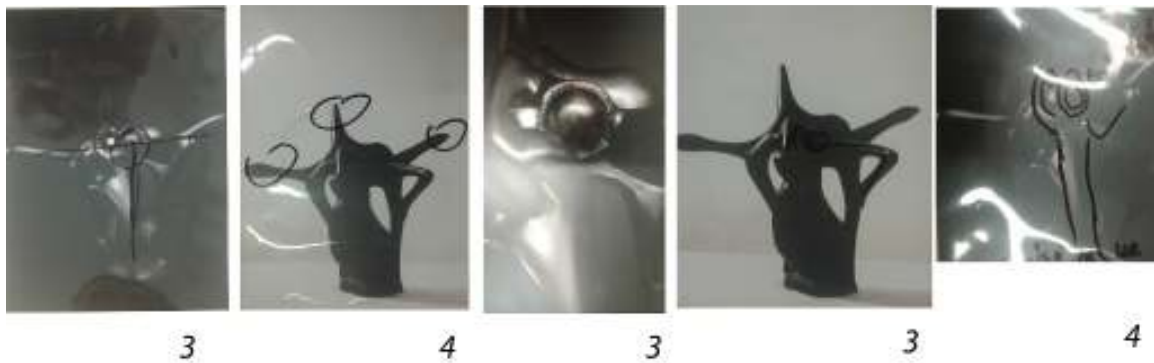


Figure No. 4. A set of drawings on the film placed on photographs taken by the respondents during the research

**Sculpture No. 5. Constantino Mpakulo, *ujamaa*, Mozambique, 1997, *Foremother*, *chiaroscuro* convention (photo by Piotr Sadurski)**

This work, like most works used in the research, evoked both positive and negative associations. Among the multiplicity of interpretations, we can identify those relating to phenomena, such as dualism, totem, commune or domination. These observations can be regarded as very close to the real values and message conveyed by the *ujamaa* style in the Makonde sculpture. As interesting opinion was expressed by a 40-year-old man, who believed that “a caring spirit in the company of a tribal chief<sup>1</sup> influences human fates.” Another opinion was expressed by a respondent aged 33, according to whom in this photograph “a demon has taken over the soul of a chief, who, exploiting his subjects, treats them like marionettes. That’s why they are sad, uncertain, absent-minded, not knowing what tomorrow will bring.” According to one of a respondent aged 30, this figure reminds her of the image of Satan, evoking considerable fear.

**Sculpture No. 6. Mathias Mbangwende, *shetani*, Tanzania, 1997, *Eye of Providence*, *chiaroscuro* convention (photo by Piotr Sadurski)**



Figure No. 5. A set of photographs used in the research (from No. 6 to No. 10)

This work brought a lot of controversial opinions. As many as 9 out of 14 respondents associated it with deformities, injuries, disability or illness. Most respondents stated that the author of the work may have wanted to warn against bad behaviour, which may result in a severe punishment. One of respondent, a man aged about 40, said that the sculpture can be described in two words “traffic accident.” In turn, a 20-year-old woman who took part in the research described the sculpture as

“an obvious example of impairment or mental illness, visible even in expressions of an underdeveloped face.” Another common associations were sexual ones, equating the opening of

<sup>1</sup> It should be remembered that the figure shown here is a woman, which is suggested by a mouth padlock, which is a decoration characteristic of women in the Makonde tradition.

the mouth to the anus, or the finger below the said opening – to the penis. In turn, 4 out of 14 respondents described the sculpture as an eye of divine providence, which constantly observes, rewarding good deeds, and punishing bad ones. According to a man aged 55, “it is so disgusting and dreary, primitive and nasty that it makes me sick when I look at it.” Another respondent, a 29-year-old man, said: “it is a beautiful sculpture with such interesting forms that I could look at it for hours.” He claimed that he would love to have it at home and thought that contemplation of this work would take a significant amount of time in his life. He believed that “this work is so interesting that over time, as a result of reception, I could always admire another fragment, reinterpreting it.” As it clearly results from the above set of statements, opinions of Warsaw respondents greatly diversified. What is particularly interesting, this work, regardless of presented emotional “gradation”, each time aroused very strong experiences, accompanied by intense emotions.

**No. 7. Constantino Mpakulo, *ujamaa*, Mozambique, 1997, Foremother – detail, formal convention (own photograph)**



Figure No. 6. A set of drawings on the film made on photographs taken by the respondents during the examination

The most important association evoked during contact with the work was reference its values to protection of the family. Among the opinions of respondents was, among others, a sentence of a 30-year-old woman: “The photo depicts a man and a woman who care for each other.” There was also very interesting interpretation of this element as a “family being a foundation” – a sentence of a respondent aged 33; or another of a 40-year-old man:

“a couple may constitute the crown of the tree of existence.” There was also an opinion referring to great importance that the presented figures attach to supporting each other in the heavy oppression in which they are. A small number of the respondents perceived the presented people as a family threatened by an ape-like figure “hanging over them.” This figure is visible on the right side of the photo.

**Sculpture No. 8. Hossein Ananganola, *shetani*, Tanzania, 1998, *Popobawa* – detail, formal convention (photo by dr Eugeniusz Rzewuski)**

Interpretations of this photograph can be considered very unusual. Apart from obvious references, such as association of the presented creature with a bird, phoenix or bat<sup>1</sup>, there were also quite innovative opinions. Two respondents, women aged 76 and 33, saw a deer. Both thought that this was a scene showing the hunt, deer and head of the hunter, who was presented, according to the 33-year-old woman, as the one who “is supposed to get food”. These opinions were interesting, because the respondents did not change their minds even when they returned to the

<sup>1</sup> The presented creature is a bat made in the style of *shetani*. In Eastern Africa, the society believes in a demon called *Popobawa*, who appears in African homes in the form of a bat, initiating sexual contacts with men. A common case until this day is the statement that a politician was visited by *Popobawa* during the election. Then his support largely decreases. A bat and a chameleon are creatures characteristic of the sculptures of the grandmaster Hossein Ananganol.

cabinet. It should be noted that at the time of perception of the sculptures and photographs, the respondents were fully aware that the works shown to them belong to the East African art, the more interesting is interpretation of a fragment of this sculpture as an animal biologically and geographically belonging to another continent. The above-mentioned women opened themselves to the real message brought by the work only when another interpretation (concerning *Popobawa*, portrayed as a bat) was approximated to them. Then the women began to agree to a different analysis. The respondents were not in any way related to each other, nor could they hear the other person's statements, since each of them visited the exhibition on a different day. Another observation was the opinion of a 40-year-old man, seeing under the left wing (seen from the perspective of the recipient) the head of a man in a helmet, who, in his opinion, "looked like a knight". The man thought, however, that it must be a kind of illusion that his mind was playing, because he did not suppose that the figure of a knight could be expressed in an African sculpture.

**Sculpture No. 9. Simuni Dastani, *shetani*, Tanzania, 1998, *Woman with gourd* + detail, *chiaroscuro* convention (photo by Piotr Sadurski)**

This work recalled a number of different associations, among which references to motherhood or hard work performed by African women were obvious. One of the respondents, a woman aged 20, believed that: "this work has clear references to contemporary art." Another interesting opinion came from a man aged 28, who compared the presented figure to the works of Zdzisław Beksiński. A very interesting statement was expressed by a 55-year-old man: "The presented figure in connection with the emphasized hole in the place where the face should be, contrasting with the face in the disappearing smoke, brings to mind a situation in which a woman wants to shout something and cannot." According to the respondent, since she cannot speak, she would be the perfect wife. One of the men aged 40 believed that the aforementioned lack of face is an expression of "nostalgia for a previous life, from the pre-motherhood period, associated with carefree life. As evidenced by the woman hanging at her feet - the former her, who reminds her that she was shackled."

**Sculpture No. 10. Constantino Mpakulo, *ujamaa*, Mozambique, 1997, *Foremother*, formal convention (own photograph)**

The scale of interpretation of this work is much broader than one would suppose. Most of the respondents described a fragment of this sculpture as full of sadness, nostalgia, expectation and reverie. An important emotion that was taken into account here was fear. One of the women, aged about 20, emphasized: "In my opinion, the figures depicted here look as if frozen, frozen in anticipation of the evil that is supposed to reach them." Another respondent aged 45 described this work as "an expression of family protection, with particular emphasis on the role of the mother to whom the infant is huddled." According to another woman aged 33, the work resembled a "collective grave." During his contact with work, a 40-year-old man stated: "I see a ritual orgy here, let's say, on the occasion of the equinox."

## Results

As has been repeatedly mentioned, during the research the respondents were presented with both Makonde sculptures and comprehensive and fragmentary photos made in two different conventions. Deliberately one of the sculptures, titled *Foremother*<sup>1</sup>, was shown in one of the photographs in all its glory, and then in two photographs in fragments. During the research, these three photographs were placed at a certain distance from one another. It was interesting whether there would be a person among the respondents who would notice that they depict the same work.

<sup>1</sup> Tytuł nadany przez kolekcjonerów.



It was also interesting whether perception of these three works had a common interpretative denominator. However, only one respondent, a doctor of anthropology, noted the aforementioned dependence of the three works. Two other respondents connected only two photographs, completely rejecting the third one.

Drawn conclusions were based on the question asked to all the respondents at the end of the research: do they think that some of the photographs could have depicted the same sculpture? 11 out of 14 respondents rejected such a possibility.

In a systemic perspective, the whole is more than just the sum of individual parts. This sentence suggests that in a given context, fragments remain what they are, but at the same time they are connected by mystic commonality, which makes them different. Placing a subject in an adequate or inappropriate context has a significant impact on its perception. What has particular importance here is a cultural code. By adopting the correct code, consistent with the proper origin of the perceived artefact, we increase the chance to properly understand the proper values contained in the work of art. In the path of conscious perception, it is very important to be able to perceive a work in a holistic way, thanks to which it is much easier to embed it in the right interpretative and cognitive field. It is much easier then not only to understand the message of a given work, but also to correctly evaluate all fragments of the sculpture. In connection with the above, it is assumed that probability of recognition of individual details and linking them to the proper sculpture is not possible, or is doubtful if the proper cultural code is not known. Appearance of each element individually influences, albeit subconsciously, perception of the whole structure and gives meaning to individual elements. When we see a sculpture, a part of which has been chipped off, as recipients, we will most likely experience some kind of dissatisfaction or emptiness associated with this gap. Following Rudolf Arnheim, "no element of a work of art will ever be independent." (Arnheim 2004, p. 91). Therefore, none of the elements should be treated in a completely autonomous manner. Already Aristotle considered similarity as one of the properties of things, evoking associations in mind, requiring memories to connect the past with the present.

Attempts to analyse the whole and fragmentary photography, presenting a specific work of a Makonde artist were a kind of play with some sort of optical illusions. The individual respondents were entangled in an ambiguous game or a puzzle that could be solved but not necessarily. At the same time, it is impossible to clearly determine which solution, considering the situation from a cognitive perspective, is more interpretatively attractive. We only know which one was real. Most likely, the fact that the fragments were correctly placed on the overall map of the sculpture *Foremother* presented from various perspectives could not have a significant impact on perception of the sculpture. It should also be taken into account that this relationship could have been noticed by a larger number of respondents, however, being uncertain, they decided not to express it. Frequently, after the first look, we are able to determine the subject with which we are dealing. Naturally, this does not mean that the sense of sight neglects details. Even children notice minor changes in familiar objects. However, it should be assumed that a viewer may not be able to determine a reason for a given change was born, which he obviously notices. This is because signs of change are an element of a coherent layout which is well-known to the viewer (Arnheim 2004, p. 58).

The research made it possible to select 4 main types of reception characterizing the respondents.

1. A group of people who were much more excited by reception of photographs in the *chiaroscuro* convention.
2. A group of people who were much more excited by reception of photographs in the formal convention.
3. A group of people for whom the change of style did not matter.

4. A group of people for whom the change of style was so important that they were not able to recognize that they are dealing with the work shown in a different convention just now.

As can be seen from the above list, interpretative and cognitive paths presented by the group of respondents selected from the Warsaw society are very diverse. There are some noticeable common features of particular groups. So we can observe that some methods of human perception and reception are similar. It is, however, very difficult to clearly state what features determine reception of works of art. It is also difficult to talk about correct or incorrect reception. Certainly sculptures seen by Warsaw citizens evoked considerable emotions. According to Michel Kirby, there is no one method to interpret a given work of art (Kirby 1987, p. 166). The concept of art should be considered by each individual, because everyone perceives it in a different way. At the same time, it does not matter if a given work is universally recognized as good or bad. What matters is only emotional connotation related directly to our experience when dealing with a given work. For example, if we felt fear or anxiety when viewing the exhibition as a result of contact with art, according to Kirby, the experience itself already defines the sculptures depicted in the exhibition as works of art. This is because the essence is not positive, idyllic feelings associated with our internal experience related to the exhibition. The essence is the very experience that we had in relation to what affected our senses. Therefore, our opinion about a given work, or the emotions accompanying its perception are irrelevant. What is relevant is the fact that there are any emotions associated with perception of a given phenomenon. It is through experience, in the relation between the object and the recipient, that the work from mere creation becomes a work of art. It is a bit as if our emotions gave it that sense. Whereby the more a work falls into the recipient's psyche, the more important it seems to us (Kirby 1987, p. 166).



Figure No. 7. All pictures showing the sculpture of Foremother (photo 1 by Piotr Sadurski, photo 2 and 3 – own photos)

Since the beginning of mankind, there has been social, cultural and moral diversity. There has also existed aesthetic diversity, as well as diversity related to satisfying aesthetic needs, which is the basic demand resulting from the human nature. Importance of aesthetics is evidenced by the fact that despite many attempts to downplay its role in human life, its problems still remain valid, while the questions it poses and answers given through its prism continue to lead us through a lively scientific discussion. No matter how we approach the subject of works of art, perception will always be a stop on the road leading to full reception, as a result of which an aesthetic experience may appear. The factor causing an aesthetic experience remains irrelevant. A discussion on aesthetic significance of culturally different works of art is still open. What is certain here is the fact that there are many (often intriguing) misunderstandings at the time when Europeans come into contact with African artists. Probably an African not familiar with the European point of view, tradition and history of collecting will not see the difference (even if financial) between works of art from the Louvre and the sculptures of Makonde artists sold on the Mwangwe market in Dar Es Saalam. What is the value of these objects and who should decide about it? As we can deduct from the respondents' statements, even during good presentation of works from Africa,

there can always be some dissatisfaction resulting from a different cultural code in which their meaning was written down. As a result, a recipient may find it really difficult to understand the viewed works and embed them in the proper context.

In any case perception of *demonic bestiary of Makonde* resulted in the whole range of emotions, associations and even sensations. Therefore, it can be assumed that during reception of Makonde sculptures aesthetic experience took place. The emotions appearing most often as a result of reception were anxiety and joy. The most common associations of the recipients referred to demons and other creatures and extraterrestrial beings, religion, family, death and sex. A very small number of people participating in the research presented a pejorative attitude towards the works presented during the exhibition. Most respondents considered the research as a nice time, arranging experience derived from reception of the sculptures.

Obtained results may become an important basis for extracting qualitative results. It is worth paying attention to the interest which the respondents gave to the research, which can be confirmed by a very long time spent on conducting interviews.<sup>1</sup> It would also be interesting to compare Warsaw results to wider research conducted in Poland or worldwide, but for objective reasons it is impossible. Therefore, this topic should be left behind as a basis for further discourse, which in the future can be used for subsequent analyses.

The assumptions were not fully reflected in the research results. One of them was i.a. the conviction that in case of most respondents the *chiaroscuro* convention would intensify the impression of horror or fear during reception of the works. However, according to the interviews, this result was reflected only partially.

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<sup>1</sup> Czas wywiadu kierowanego podczas badania wahał się od 30 min do 2 godz. 50 min.



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### ***Demonic bestiary of Makonde in the perception of Warsaw respondents***

*Perception is a particularly interesting and quite diverse phenomenon. It mainly depends on different interpretations presented by recipients. This work aims at constituting a cross-sectional list of analyses of attitudes presented by Warsaw society during contact with sculptures of Makonde artists. Thanks to the support of PTAfr and the courtesy of the Library in Koszykowa Street, on 16-19 January, and on 24 January 2018, research was carried out in reference to the exhibition titled: «Między sztuką a opętaniem. Hebanowe bestiarium ludu Makonde. Fotografie Piotra Sadurskiego» [Between Art and Possession. Ebony bestiary of Makonde people. Piotr Sadurski Photography]. During the exhibition, sculptures from the collection of Ewa and Eugeniusz Rzewuski entered into the artistic dialogue with photographs by Piotr Sadurski. All the exhibited works were mainly in the style of shetani, referring to demonic presentations. Makonde sculptures are an example of contemporary art of East Africa. Their roots should be sought in indigenous traditions and beliefs. Makonde artists come from Mozambique, but as a result of social unrest many of them were forced to leave their homeland. They found themselves safe in Tanzania, where a large part of Makonde people live and create in the Dar Es Salaam area until today. The exhibition featured sculptures of the most outstanding representatives of this trend. Within the research, the respondents attending the exhibition were presented with photographs made in two distinct stylistic conventions: chiaroscuro one and formal one. The primary objective of this is to show some ways of perception of Makonde artists' sculptures, distant in terms of culture, by respondents participating in the Warsaw research.*

*Keywords: perception, East Africa, Makonde, contemporary art of Tanzania.*

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