

*Travelling
exhibition*

MASKS GÈLÈDÈ
THE POWER OF MOTHERS



MASQUES GÈLÈDÈ
LE POUVOIR DES MÈRES

Strasbourg's Château Vodou is offering its temporary exhibition 2023 for rental. Offer your visitors the chance to dive into West Africa and discover over sixty colorful, animated sculpted masks.



Gèlèdè mask, 20th

Wood, natural blue and white pigments
Arbogast Collection Inv. number 1476

Monochrome mask with pierced eyes, bearing the three traditional scarifications on each cheek, typical of the Yoruba people. These characteristics might indicate that it is a very ancient mask, probably dating from the beginning of the 20th century.

CHÂTEAU MUSÉE VODOU

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THE CHÂTEAU VODOU IN STRASBOURG



THE MUSEUM

The unique Château Vodou houses the largest private collection of West African vodou artefacts in the world. Located in the Grand Est region, in the heart of Strasbourg it aims to offer a unique experience to every visitor. All the objects on display have been used in ancestral practices: medicine, divination, birth, unions or other events linked to the major stages of life.

The collection, which comes from Ghana, Benin, Togo and Nigeria, reveals its secrets in an exceptional setting: an 1878 water tower listed in the supplementary inventory of historic monuments.

The museum is run by a not-for-profit association and opened its doors in 2014. The collection belongs to Marc and Marie Luce Arbogast and has been built up since the 1970s.

LE VODOU

Born in West-Africa, vodou spirituality results from the encounter of Yoruba, Fon, and Ewe cults. This religion took its actual form around the 17th century A.D.

The vodou religion, embracing a large spectrum of practices and beliefs, counts millions of adepts around the world. It is nowadays still particularly practised in West-Africa, but also, in other forms, in Northern and Southern America, in the Caribbeans, as well as in Europe.

Far from the clichés and the Hollywood preconceptions, “vodoun” (the vernacular term for this religion) is the expression of a world view, a practical philosophy with tangible efficiency for humans.

It provides a framework for key moments in life (birth, sickness, marriages, death) and seeks to answer personal questions. Its aim is to maintain harmony between the visible world – the terrestrial world of nature – and the invisible world, inhabited by the gods and the ancestors.

Communication with this invisible world occurs through divination, rituals, music, dances, and trance states, but also thanks to cult objects. The vodou pantheon consists of more than 400 deities, each possessing its own specific features: a distinctive role to play, typical rituals and symbols. But this rich and complex culture still carries a lot of secrets.

THE COLLECTION

The Château Vodou collection is a private collection of more than 1400 artefacts, belonging to Marc and Marie-Luce Arbogast. 220 exhibits are displayed in the frame of the permanent exhibition “Vodou, the art of seeing differently”.

The Arbogast collection and the theme of vodou are linked to numerous subjects in our cultural programs and guided tours: slave trade, colonisation, duty of remembrance, people history, history of arts, herbal medicine, beliefs, faith, personal and philosophical questioning, magic, creativity... The museum is a wonderful tool to address the ideas of opening up to others, sharing, and tolerance.

Learn more: [The Charter of the Château Vodou](#)

THE EXHIBITION MASKS GÈLÈDÈ, THE POWER OF MOTHERS

Adeline Beck

*Don't forget to touch the ground with your fingertips
if you hear about the lyami osorongá.*

The ones who are named "our Mothers" in Yoruba. The ones who are celebrated by the tradition of the Gèlèdè. They are feared and respected because they possess a sacred power, the power of "ashè"¹. Elles ont la réputation de se transformer en oiseaux et de se réunir la nuit. Ce sont des femmes âgées ou mères qui ne peuvent plus concevoir et qui détiennent le secret de la vie.

They have the a reputation of for transforming themselves into birds and for gathering at night. They are old women or mothers who can no longer conceive and who hold the secret of life. The Gèlèdè mask ceremonies have their roots in Kétou, Benin. They are performed in on the public square place in order to protect themselves the community from the wrath of the "Mothers" and to gain their favor. They aim at regulating the life of the society, transmitting messages and solving problems: epidemics, droughts, famines... They are the guarantors of morals and traditions by sending messages to the *Orishas*² or the ancestors. The cult is divided between nighttime festivities and daytime ceremonies: some are satirical, others are more solemn or moving.

These impressive costumes, worn by excellent dancers, are made up of fabric outfits and carved wooden headdresses. Accompanied by musicians and singers, they have become major players in the cohesion of communities practicing Vodoun. The wooden piece worn on the head shows displays colorful narrative scenes, sometimes articulated with animals or humans. While the men put on and give life to the costumes, it is the women who pull the strings of the ceremonies are pulled by women.

A Yoruba proverb states that "the eyes that have seen the Gèlèdè have seen the ultimate spectacle". It has been listed as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO since 2008.

The Château Vodou welcomes you to a colorful and life lively exhibition of masks from the Arbogast collection.

¹ Called *ajé*: in fon language.

² *Orishas*: deities in Yoruba language.

TECHNICAL DETAILS

The exhibition presents the various Gèlèdè ceremonies performed in West Africa. Of Yoruba heritage, there are two main types of ceremony in this cult: night-time ceremonies, which have an important spiritual vocation, and daytime ceremonies, which are more festive and satirical.

THE EXHIBITION CONSISTS OF:

- 9 large panels explaining the specific characteristics of Gèlèdè: these are not directly linked to the objects presented in each category, making it easier to adapt the scenography.
- Labels for each exhibited object.
- 54 artefacts (wooden sculptures) averaging 45 x 35 x 35 cm (in its original form presented at Château Vodou), as well as a complete mask with fabric clothing.
- A selection of 13 photographs by Beninese, Turkish and English artists.
- A podcast that can be displayed within the exhibition (sound only available in French).
- An exhibition catalogue that can be provided for sale (152 pages - French, German, English).

The digital version of the catalogue is available for viewing on request.

SURFACE AREA:

The exhibition spreads over 70 m² in our exhibition room in Strasbourg, but this surface area can be adjusted.

LANGUAGES:

- French
- German
- English

SET-UP:

About four days.

AUDIENCE:

From 6 years old.

COLLECTOR'S **EDITORIAL**

MARC ARBOGAST

In January 1980, returning from the Pendjari area, located west of the W National Park, and given some time before coming back to France, my wife Marie Luce and I decided to go down to Cotonou alongside the Ouémé River. On the road, short before Okpa, we turned towards the Okpara, a tributary of the river. This confluence marks the border with Nigeria: the Yoruba culture is very present and predominant.

We entered a small, purely agricultural village where it seemed that there was not a living soul. We could hear drums in the distance, so we moved closer until we reached the village square where a festival was taking place. This was our first encounter with the Gèlèdè. Everyone was laughing and the children were celebrating. The participants, very agitated, were fleeing in front of a character fully dressed on stilts, who was wearing a mask on his head representing a dog's head and whose ears he could move. This made him come alive for the children and explained their fright.

The Gèlèdè ceremonies take place, except in rare cases, in agricultural villages. They usually begin very late in the evening and last until dawn, only to resume in the afternoon of the following day. During the nocturnal part, rigorously orchestrated, the cult takes place in the presence of the initiates only. These ceremonies follow requests from the heads of families to help them solve their problems with the harvest, the sale of their products, or even to organize a funeral for a devotee.

The Gèlèdè is a ceremony conducted by women even though the mask bearers are men.

For the daytime part, the carved wooden masks present satirical life scenes and also critical towards those who have deviated from the rules of ordinary life. This way we can see lazy settlers carried in hammocks, men showing off a large sex, reckless car drivers... These satirical Gèlèdè performances are punctuated by the release of the dogs and leopards Gèlèdè who dive towards the villagers, frightening them and biting the troubled spirits.

At the beginning, these masks mounted on the head, with their childish side for some, did not seem to fit into the intensity of the Vodou cult. It was therefore out of ignorance that Marie-Luce and I were slow to include them in the collection of the Château Musée Vodou. It is by studying them that we discovered their full cultural and artistic scope. The ancient Gèlèdè are recognizable by the finesse of their sculptures and above all by the fact that they were colored only with natural pigments alone.

Since the mid-twentieth century the paintings used are acrylic and more recently some masks that are manufactured by local artists as art objects will no longer be used for ceremonies. All the Gèlèdè exhibited here are cult objects that have been used for years. This temporary exhibition is more playful than all those made to date in the museum and will incite you to discover these ceremonies in Benin where you will always be welcomed in the villages where they are held.

MASKS GÈLÈDÈ THE POWER OF MOTHERS

Commissaires : Adeline Beck et Marc Arbogast.

Présidence : Dominique Baudendistel.

Recherches scientifiques et rédaction des textes principaux : Katia-Myriam Borth-Arnold, Elise Matt Gehringer aux côtés de Jean-Yves Anézo (podcast), Ana Carolina Gonzalez Palacios (article), Noé Meyer (descriptifs).

Scénographie et Graphisme : Ana Carolina Gonzalez Palacios.

Traductions : Katia-Myriam Borth-Arnold, Elise Matt Gehringer, Michaël Mailfert.

Illustration affiche : Joseph Béhé, dessinateur de bande dessinée.

Photographies des objets de la collection : Pascal Beck

Photographies et films présentés dans l'exposition : Cyrill Noyalet, Yanick Folly, Köksal Şahin, David Paul Carr, musée Départemental Albert Kahn, Marc Arbogast.

Équipe technique : Sébastien Furderer, Clément Levieux, Loïc Anézo, Noé Meyer, Quentin, Pascal, Evelyne et Béliat Beck.

Remerciements :

Cyrill Noyalet pour ses conseils scientifiques, Régis Goudou et Evelyne Beck pour les relectures, Michel Meyer pour la conception d'animations, Kawati Studios pour « Carnets Vodou », Point Carré pour les impressions et tous nos partenaires de cœur et d'action.



Opposite : Team photo
Standing (left to right):
Jean-Yves Anézo, Katia-Myriam Borth-Arnold, Marc Arbogast.
Seated (left to right): Ana Carolina Gonzalez Palacios, Adeline Beck, Elise Matt Gehringer.

THE GÈLÈDÈ AND ITS ORIGINS

A BIT OF HISTORY...

The practice of Gèlèdè ceremonies was born in the 18th century in the east of Benin, more specifically in the locality of Kétou. It can be observed among the Yoruba and the Nago in Nigeria, Togo and Benin.

In the Yoruba spirituality that gave birth to the Gèlèdè, women hold two-faceted powers. One is positive, as dispensers of life and wisdom, and the other is negative, as perpetrators of plagues such as drought and epidemics. The Gèlèdè is considered to be a worship of the supernatural and mystical gifts of the Iyas, the "Mothers", from whom it is necessary to protect oneself as well as to appease them. By doing so, one allows the transformation of their powers into beneficial power for society. The functions exclusively dedicated to women in the Gèlèdè revolve around certain secret rituals that can only be performed by a female person.

However, the role of women must be nuanced: although in the context of the Gèlèdè events, women lend some of their loincloths, all the Yoruba masks are worn by men, and the costumes are also made by men. Likewise, the carving of the headdresses and the composition of the songs are also their responsibility.

The Gèlèdè outfit is composed of various elements combined to form the mask: a carved wooden piece is mounted on the head, while the face and body are dressed up with an assembly of fabrics, the ankles ornamented with bell anklets, and large slippers protect the feet.

Nevertheless, in various degrees and under different aspects, assuring exclusive functions, the presence of women is primordial and effective. First of all, in the representation of birds, which can be found carved on the percussion instruments played during the ceremony, as well as on certain wooden ornaments worn by the dancers. It is said that the «Mothers» meet at night and turn themselves into this animal.

KM. BA.

EXHIBITION'S PICTURES



Gèlèdè mask Agba éfè, 20th

Wood, industrial paint and fabric

h. 57 x w. 26 x d. 30 cm

Arbogast Collection Inv. number 1107

It is dedicated to the dangers and magical forces of the night, incarnated by the mothers who come to haunt the dreams, and is the only one entitled to speak to convey the message of the Iyas. It necessarily comes out after nightfall and can last until dawn. He is the husband of Tètèdè.



Gèlèdè mask, 20th

Wood, natural blue and white pigments

h. 23 x w. 16,5 x d. 24 cm

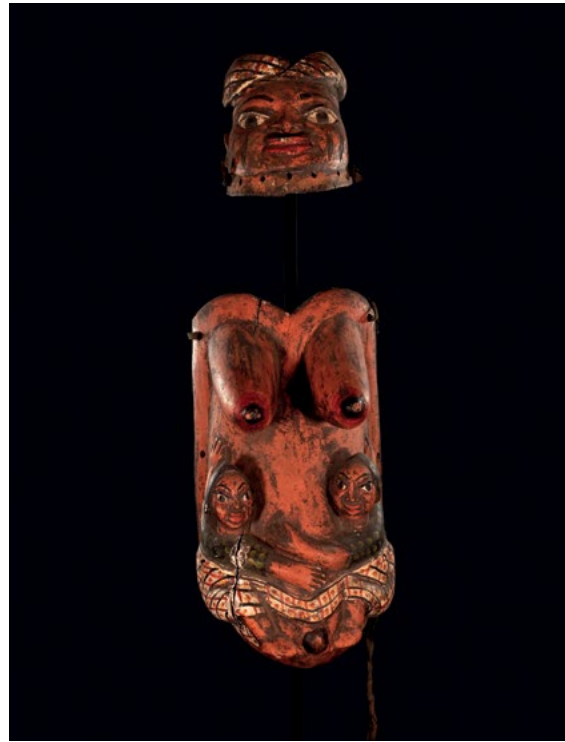
Arbogast Collection Inv. number 1121

This male face with its three scarifications on the forehead and cheeks, so typical of Gèlèdè symbols, is a mask that symbolizes the kingdoms of the Yoruba world. It could originate from Kétou.



Gèlèdè mask, 20th

Wood, industrial paint, fabric, rope and nails
h. 57 x w. 45 x d. 36 cm
Arbogast Collection Inv. number 1531



Gèlèdè mask, 20th

Wood, industrial paint and rope
h. 57 x w. 45 x d. 36 cm
Arbogast Collection Inv. number 1405



Avoun Gèlèdè mask, 20th

Wood, industrial paint, fabric and rope
h. 40,5 x w. 46 x d. 30 cm
Arbogast Collection Inv. number 1174



Gèlèdè mask, 20th

Wood
h. 18 x w. 14 x d. 42 cm
Arbogast Collection Inv. number 1408



Gèlèdè mask Agba éfè, 20th

Wood, industrial paint and mirrors

h. 27 x w. 20 x d. 19 cm

Arbogast Collection Inv. number 1527

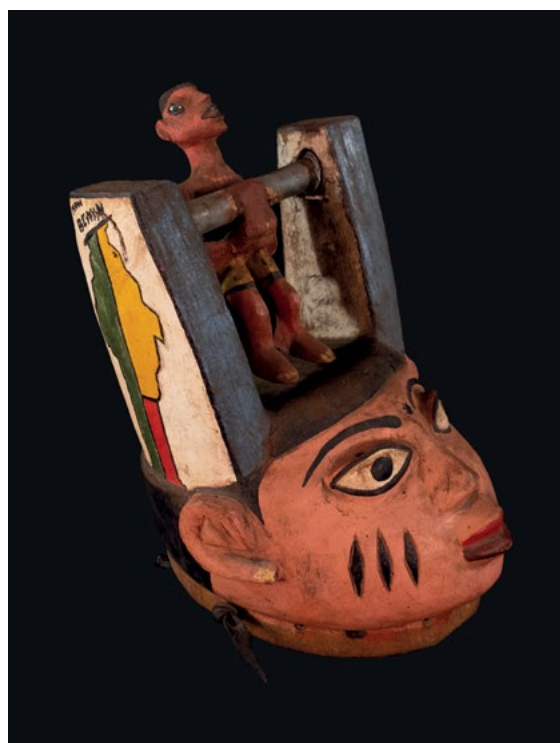


Gèlèdè mask, 20th

Wood and industrial paint

h. 30 x w. 30 x d. 30 cm

Arbogast Collection Inv. number 1515

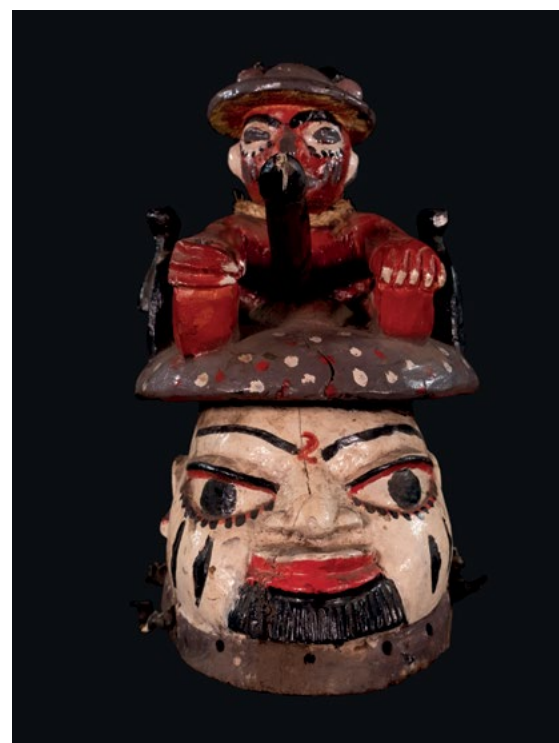


Gèlèdè mask, 20th

Wood, industrial paint and rope

h. 34 x l. 31 x P. 25 cm

Arbogast Collection Inv. number 1534



Gèlèdè mask, 20th

Wood, industrial paint, nails and rope

h. 37 x w. 20 x d. 24 cm

Arbogast Collection Inv. number 1521

HIRING THE EXHIBITION

HOSTING AN EXHIBITION OF THE CHÂTEAU VODOU MEANS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF:

- An in-house creation, tested and appreciated by our audiences.
- Personalised support from a team specialising in the theme (communication, content, legal issues, etc.)
- A modular exhibition that can be completely adapted to your needs (language, scenography, etc.)

THE EXHIBITION HIRE INCLUDES:

- The cession of the rights to use the museographic and scientific concept.
- The provision of content in the form of digital files (texts in French, German and English and podcast in French).
- The museographic objects from the annexed list
- Museographic support for the adaptation and coordination of the project.
- Mediation tools for the exhibition: educational sheets and files.

PRICES:

The hire charge is calculated according to the content selected and the exhibition surface area.

- Basic package for one month of exhibition with all the objects, 13 photographs, the podcast: 12 000 €
- If extension of more than one month: 1 000 € per additional month.

TO BE ADDED FOR THE HOSTING STRUCTURE:

- The scenography,
- Transport of the objects,
- Insurance,
- Travel expenses for one person to follow up the installation (3 days on site).
- If required, in addition: travel expenses for a mediator to train the team on site (2 days on site)
- Translation costs (if the language is not French, German or English)



General views,
Château Vodou - Strasbourg 2023
© Pascal Beck (unless otherwise stated)



OBJET NO.	INVENTORY NO.	TITLE	INSURANCE VALUES
1	1107	<i>Gèlèdè mask Agba éfè</i>	3 500 €
2	1121	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
3	1510	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
4	1476	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
5	1531	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
6	1406	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
7	1405	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
8	1174	<i>Avoun Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
9	1525	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
10	1535	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
11	1505	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
12	1507	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
13	1508	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
14	1408	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
15	1473	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
16	1161	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
17	1528	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
18	1523	<i>Gèlèdè mask Agba éfè</i>	3 000 €
19	1532	<i>Gèlèdè mask Agba éfè</i>	3 000 €
20	1522	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
21	1527	<i>Gèlèdè mask Agba éfè</i>	3 000 €
22	1518	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
23	1516	<i>Gèlèdè mask Agba éfè</i>	3 000 €
24	1537	<i>Gèlèdè mask Agba éfè</i>	3 000 €
25	1514	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
26	1515	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
27	1517	<i>Gèlèdè mask Agba éfè</i>	3 000 €
28	1439	<i>Chawolo bracelet</i>	200 €
29	1538	<i>Chawolo bracelet</i>	200 €
30	1539	<i>Chawolo bracelet</i>	200 €
31	1540	<i>Chawolo bracelet</i>	200 €
32	1541	<i>Chawolo bracelet</i>	200 €
33	1542	<i>Chawolo bracelet</i>	200 €
34	1543	<i>Chawolo bracelet</i>	200 €

35	1534	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
36	1533	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
37	1520	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
38	1519	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
39	1521	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
40	1424	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
41	1425	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
42	1186	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
43	1310	<i>Avoun Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
44	1170	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
45	1155	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
46	1511	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
47	1506	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
48	1536	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
49	1512	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
50	1530	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
51	1475	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
52	1529	<i>Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
53	0123A	<i>Avoun Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €
54	1609	<i>Avoun Gèlèdè mask</i>	3 000 €

PRACTICAL INFORMATIONS

Château Vodou

4 rue de Koenigshoffen
67000 STRASBOURG
+33(0)3 88 36 15 03
contact@chateau-vodou.com

Opening times

Everyday from 2 pm to 6 pm
Groups (+ de 8 pers.) : booking required.

Admission fees

Adults : 14 €
Reduced & groups* : 11 €
Children (6-10 years) : 8 €

* -Students, 11-25 y.o., jobseekers, large families,
people with disabilities.

Groups

From 9 am to 9 pm, booking required.
contact@chateau-vodou.com
+33 (0)3 88 36 15 03
www.chateau-vodou.com

Getting to the museum

From Strasbourg train station : 10 min. walk
Bus : 10, 4 et 2 // Tram : F - stop Porte Blanche-
Musée Vodou.

Park & Ride «Parc des Romains» located directly at
the motorway exit, 5 min. walk to the museum.



Contact

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