

### Context

- 1) The wooden figure would contain a nkisi, which is loosely translated to spirit. These figures can release and contain the spirits as well.
- 2) It was used as a "oath taking" image used to help settle arguments and determine innocence or guilt.
- 3) It was said that what activated the spirit inside the figure was chanting and singing and sacred sacrifices.

### Function

- 1) The function of this piece was like a truth telling piece. The way it worked was the people having a disagreement would swear truth to their sides of the argument and a piece of glass, shell, wood, or rock would be nailed to the piece and if one had lied, the ancestors would take care of the problem.
- 2) In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, missionaries from other countries and they took and destroyed the statues. They considered the statues to be reckless and heinous.
- 3) These objects could have claws, which symbolized the grasping of something by the spirit, to pebbles to be pelted or to protect from being



The Power Figure (Nkisi n'kondi)

Wood, metal, glass, fabric, fiber, shells, bone, leather, gourds, and feather

Early/mid-19th century

### Purpose

- 1) The purpose of the figure was almost like a guilty conscious type of thing. Where two people who had a disagreement would swear on their side and drive an object into the figure and the person if they told a lie, would be agreeing to the consequence of having the ancestors come after them.

### Content

- 1) The power figure, (like the one above), usually have mirrored glass eyes that you can see into but not through, representing the human to spirit connection.
- 2) The mouth is usually open, which is a sign of speaking on behalf of justice and truth. Making it seem like the figure is alert and has power.
- 3) This figure is primarily wood but can be insterted with glass, clay, rocks, wood, and pother items found in the area.

Sources:

KhanAcademy.org

Artsconnected.org