



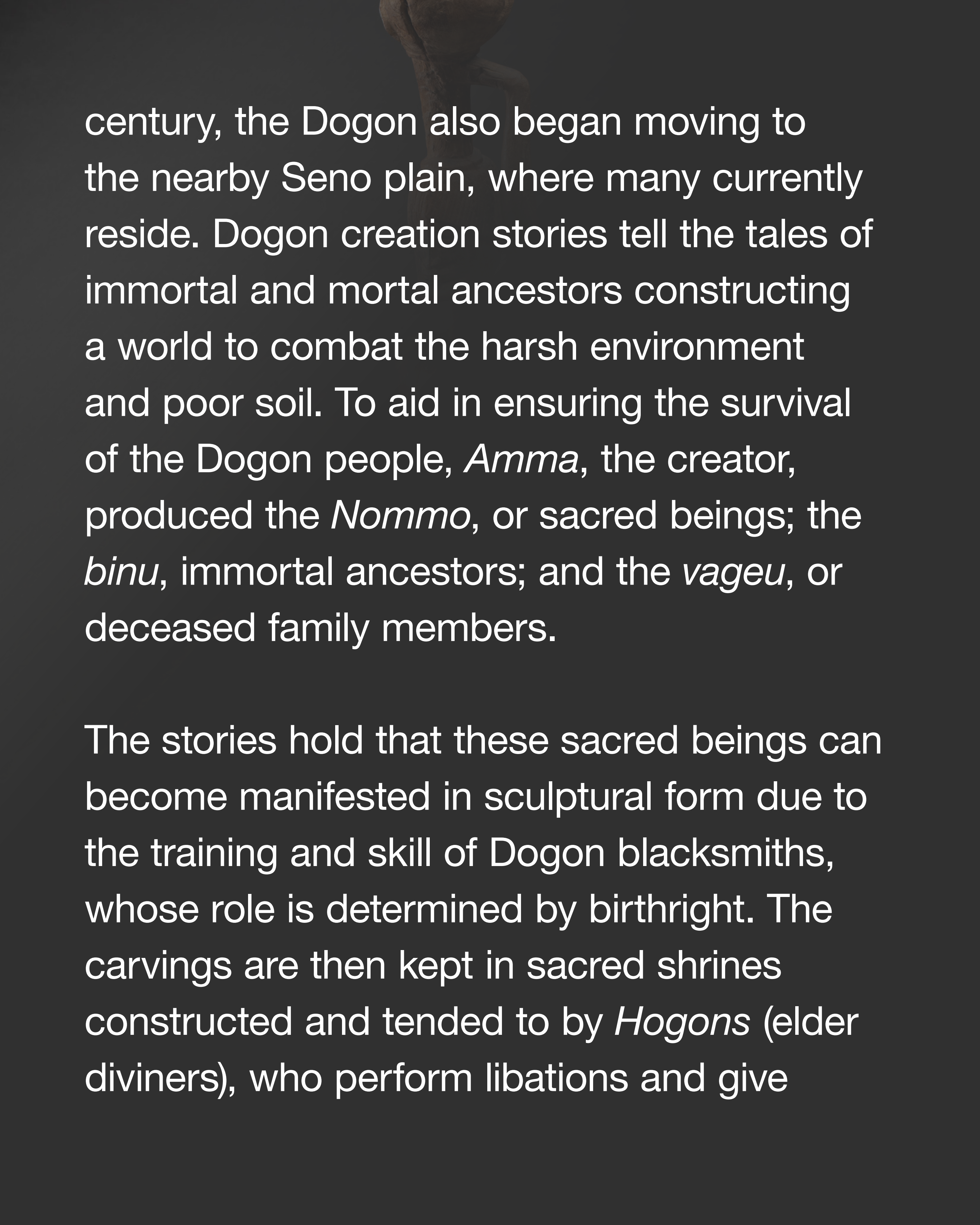
CM MASTERPIECE
MINUTE





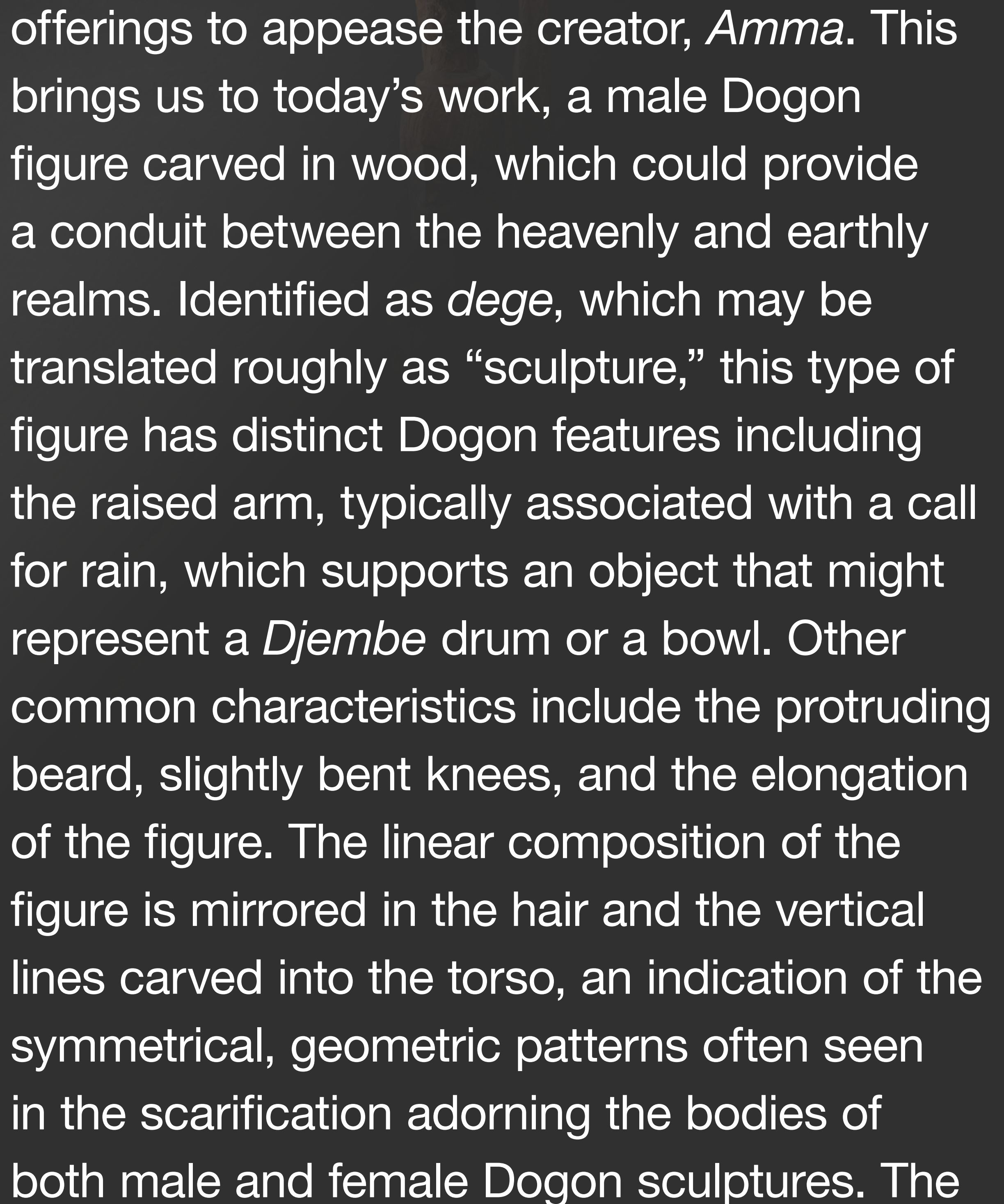
Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute at Virtual SDMA. This is your host, Denise Rogers, Professor of Art History and Manager of the World Cultures Collection at San Diego Mesa College. This week, I am guest hosting Masterpiece Minute to introduce a recent acquisition of African art by the Museum. Drop in every month for a new mini talk led by SDMA curators or their guests, highlighting selections from the Museum's collections or exhibitions.

Around the 15th century, the Dogon peoples migrated to the Bandiagara escarpment, a long sandstone cliff located in the modern country of Mali. They were first known as cliff dwellers, as their homes were constructed within the cliff face, providing protection from outside invaders. After French colonial rule in the 19th



century, the Dogon also began moving to the nearby Seno plain, where many currently reside. Dogon creation stories tell the tales of immortal and mortal ancestors constructing a world to combat the harsh environment and poor soil. To aid in ensuring the survival of the Dogon people, *Amma*, the creator, produced the *Nommo*, or sacred beings; the *binu*, immortal ancestors; and the *vageu*, or deceased family members.

The stories hold that these sacred beings can become manifested in sculptural form due to the training and skill of Dogon blacksmiths, whose role is determined by birthright. The carvings are then kept in sacred shrines constructed and tended to by *Hogons* (elder diviners), who perform libations and give



offerings to appease the creator, *Amma*. This brings us to today's work, a male Dogon figure carved in wood, which could provide a conduit between the heavenly and earthly realms. Identified as *dege*, which may be translated roughly as "sculpture," this type of figure has distinct Dogon features including the raised arm, typically associated with a call for rain, which supports an object that might represent a *Djembe* drum or a bowl. Other common characteristics include the protruding beard, slightly bent knees, and the elongation of the figure. The linear composition of the figure is mirrored in the hair and the vertical lines carved into the torso, an indication of the symmetrical, geometric patterns often seen in the scarification adorning the bodies of both male and female Dogon sculptures. The

swelling of the chest adds a female element to the overall male characteristics in the figure, which is not unusual as Dogon sculpture often reflects intersex or androgynous meanings associated with *Nommo*. Other Dogon *Nommo* include couples and equestrian figures, as well as numerous representations in mask form. Today many of these works are produced for entertainment purposes, and many Dogon have converted to Christianity, Islam, and other religions. However, a strong adherence to the veneration of *Amma*, the womb of the universe, remains.

Thank you for listening. This has been Denise Rogers on Masterpiece Minute at Virtual SDMA!

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