The Virtual Coe  Being together while being apart....

April 2, 2021

*Who is he—rhino, boar, beetle?*
One who follows the track of the elephant never gets wet from the dew on the bushes. —Akan Proverb

When first meeting this palm-sized brass animal, it is hard to grasp the rich and complex layers of history and meaning that he carries on his curved back. One cannot immediately determine who he is—rhino, boar, beetle? But it is likely that he is an elephant, with large tusks and a curved trunk. There is something incredibly endearing about this figure, his hunched back, brushy tail, and droopy ears, all of which seem somewhat far from the chiefly animal he embodies. Yet, regardless of the specifics of his appearance, this animal serves as a reminder of power, wealth, and status in Akan history.

The **Akan kingdoms** of the Gold Coast of Africa (in present-day Ghana and Ivory Coast) include various groups such as the Akyem, Akwapem, Asante, Brong, Fante, Kwahu, Sefwi, and Wassa, once controlled the extensive gold mining and trade of the ore-rich region. The gold trade was the central form of currency until British colonization eventually forced out the local economy, replacing gold dust with the British sterling pound at the end of the 19th century. For centuries before then, powerful groups, families, and individuals maintained an exchange system around unrefined gold dust. In order to accurately gauge the value of the gold dust, it was weighed on small scales using gold weights like this one.

Learn more [here](#).

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**Artist Unknown (Akan / Asante), Elephant Gold Weight**, mid to late 19th c. Brass, 1 x 2 in. AF0137

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**From the ocean....**
From the ocean, manta rays surely were easy to catch the eye. Known to venture along coastlines looking for food, it would be easy to spot them or their eggs (also commonly known as “mermaid’s purses”) along the sandy beaches. Those familiar with manta rays will know of their “other” friendly face peering from underneath on their belly, where there is a smiling happy being beaming back at you. Perhaps this piece brought a similar smile to collector Ted Coe’s face when crossing upon this friendly manta ray-man.

The Mochica of the Moche Civilization were known to be a warrior culture, depending on their ceremonial rites to interact with the parallel world. According to archeologists, they were not one homogeneous culture but a conglomeration of many smaller ones. Today, the Mochica and Moche Civilization are best known through their artfully crafted cream and reddish colored ceramics, usually made from molds with a stirrup-spout. The molded pieces were individually painted, which resulted in varied pieces even from the same mold. The glossy surface seen here results from a burnished fine clay particle paint, which was often fired in an oxygen-rich environment.
Nampeyo (1859-1942) was a widely influential potter who lived and worked at Hopi. She is regarded today as one of the finest Hopi potters and one of the most important figures whose work is displayed in museums and collections around the world.
The Coe Center is fortunate to include in its collections three ceramic pieces by the Nampeyo. In addition, the Coe collection includes a Polacca Polychrome jar (1860-1900), the type of pottery that her grandmother made and taught the young Nampeyo to make. Also, in the Coe collection is an Ancestral bowl, generally known as Sikyatki pottery (1375 to 1625 CE).

Much of the pottery produced since 1890 at the Hopi Mesas was inspired by Sikyatki pottery, named for the Ancestral village on the far eastern edge of First Mesa, where the pottery was produced and used by families and the community. Sikyatki wares inspired Nampeyo. She and her husband, Lesou, spent many hours walking over the old village, studying the potsherds.

To learn more, click here.

Top: Nampeyo, (Tewa-Hopi), Bowl, c.1893. Clay and mineral paints, 3 x 10 in. (7.6 x 25.4 cm). NA1272b
Middle: Unknown Artist (Walpi, Hopi), Jar, c.1880. Clay and mineral paints, 6 x 7.5 in. (15.2 x 19 cm). NA1535.
Bottom: Unknown Artist (Ancestral Hopi), Bowl, c.1500. Clay and mineral paints, NA 1464.

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