



## Male figure

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**Not on display**

**Title/Description:** Male figure

**Born:** 1850 - 1899

**Object Type:** Figure

**Materials:** Wood

**Measurements:** h. 317 x w. 60 x d. 85 mm

**Accession Number:** 263

**Historic Period:** 19th century - Mid/Late

**Production Place:** Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo

**Cultural Group:** Luluwa

**Credit Line:** Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

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The Luluwa have an ethnically diverse origin arising out of migrations, invasions and fusions with groups of slaves. Their distinctive and extensive body scarification was a means of establishing identity and is striking feature of their figure carving.

While Luluwa masks have some characteristics in common with the art of the neighbouring Kuba, their figures are *sui generis*, even where the cicatrisation is less than extensive here. This carving is a type called *mbulenga* and is a charm to bring fortune and beauty. At the birth of a child, magic ingredients mixed with kaolin were placed in the little cup in *mbulenga's* left hand as an offering to bring good luck and beauty to the child. *Mbulenga* figures were 'fed' by having food placed on the spiked head-dress, and they might be rubbed with red camwood powder and oil (*tukula*) to strengthen their magical power.

The making of *mbulenga* lapsed for a while after the Luluwa migration in the 1880s: later carvings have less extensive surface decoration.

Margaret Carey, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 139.

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## **Provenance**

Acquired by Henri A. Kamer by exchange from the Musée Ritauri [sic], Belgium.

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from Henri A. Kamer in 1968.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.

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