



## Cosmetic box

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**Not on display**

**Title/Description:** Cosmetic box

**Born:** 1800 c. - 1950 c.

**Object Type:** Box

**Materials:** Wood

**Measurements:** h. 80 x w. 260 x d. 120 mm

**Accession Number:** 530

**Historic Period:** 19th century, 20th century

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

**Cultural Group:** Kuba

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Boxes for camwood powder (*ngedi mu ntey*) are among the pleasantest and most typical pieces of Kuba domestic art. Camwood comes from the heartwood of the *mulombwa* tree, which occurs over most of central Africa. When ground to a fine powder and mixed with castor oil it makes a paint that is widely used in the Congo Basin area as a cosmetic or dye.

Among the Kuba, this cosmetic is called *tukula* or *twool* and it is mixed in the inverted lid of the camwood powder box. The top of the box is decorated with a mask and bordered with the interlace patterns which so reflect the Kuba love of surface pattern: similar designs surround the sides of the box. The crescentic shape recalls the half-moon phase in the lunar cycle, traditionally the time of greatest fecundity in women.

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. 197.

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## **Provenance**

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from K. J. Hewett in 1973.

Accessioned into the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia circa 1989.

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