Makishi: Mask Characters of Zambia. **Manuel Jordán. Los Angeles: Fowler Museum at UCLA, Distributed by the University of Washington Press, 2007. 84 pp.**[*]

Reviewed by Sónia Silva

Makishi are the masquerade characters of the Chokwe, Lunda, Luvale/Lwena, Mbunda, and Luchazi, closely related peoples who live in the "three corners" region of northwest Zambia, northeast Angola, and southwest Democratic Republic of the Congo. In this lavishly illustrated publication, which accompanied an exhibit with the same title held at the Fowler Museum at UCLA in early 2007, art historian and guest curator, Manuel Jordán, provides insight into the form, function, and cultural context of two different *makishi* sets from Zambia—one set of 24 wooden masks from the collection of the Fowler Museum, and a set of *makishi* studied and photographed in northwestern and western Zambia over the last two decades by Jordán. Jordán in his introductory chapter, Mary Nooter Roberts in her foreword, and Allen Roberts in his preface effectively position the book (and the exhibit) in a broader cultural, conceptual, and institutional context.

Jordán's approach is typological. Though primarily based upon Zambian materials, his typology is meant to hold true for the entire *makishi* complex, a complex of one hundred plus characters that encompasses multiple ethnicities and extends over three countries. Other authors engaged in similar typological formulations, but Jordán brings a sharper focus upon the physical and behavioral differences of individual mask characters within the *makishi* corpus. In this light, he proposes four main categories of *makishi*—sociable, ambiguous, aggressive, and royal—each category being subdivided into subtypes. A good example of this increasing level of specificity is the mask character named Pwevo. Pwevo is the archetypal sociable mask character, yet it is represented in specific performances by one or several female transmutations—Pwevo herself (the idealized beautiful woman), Mwana Pwevo (the young woman), Chiwigi (the vane woman), and Kashinakaji (the old woman).

Note that Jordán's interest in style, function, and meaning is not insensitive to sociocultural complexity and historical change. He reminds the reader that the "three corners" region is ethnically heterogeneous and complex. Although it is possible to identify singular masks or singular features of these masks by ethnic style (e.g., small sticks or bones used as teeth in Luvale and Luchazi masks), it is also true that the vicissitudes of life as well as history have led individuals of different but closely related ethnicities to intermarry, reside together in the same villages, and, unsurprisingly, participate in the same initiation rituals and *makishi* masquerades. Thus, it is not always possible to posit a clear connection between mask characters, ethnicity, and territory.

Jordán also reminds us that the role, identity, and material composition of *makishi* have changed with time. While the *makishi* continue to help articulate key cosmological, sociopolitical, and moral ideologies, they also reflect, and help make sense of, social and technological

transformation. How else to interpret the appearance of airplane *makishi*, helicopter *makishi*, and even VCR *makishi*? Similarly, while *makishi* continue to this day to be best known for their arresting performances during male initiations and chiefly ceremonies, "*makishi* clubs" have appeared in different towns and cities of Zambia, their dancers being hired to dance, for example, at political rallies. "The first *likishi* I ever saw performing," Jordán reports in a footnote, "danced every Sunday at the Kabompo jail grounds, "to bring support and happiness to the prisoners" (p. 29 n.).

Interesting but brief passages such as these, which link back to Jordán's fieldwork in Zambia, will probably make the reader wish for more. Elsewhere in the book, overarching, thought-provoking assertions call for ethnographic corroboration: how, precisely, do the *makishi* characters mutually define their differences of appearance, demeanor, role, and hierarchical standing in given performative contexts? When, precisely, and in what circumstances are they inter-exchangeable? How, precisely, are the meanings and identities of masks transformed through the process of interaction with their audiences?

This, however, would imply a different book, one which Jordán chose not to write. In *Makishi: Mask Characters of Zambia*, an exhibition-based publication, Jordán favored a culturally and historically sensitive stylistic approach in which macroscopic generalization goes hand in hand with the microscopic examination of specific mask characters, their physical attributes, their demeanor, and the recognition of their types and subtypes. He has thus succeeded in disclosing the vitality of an artistic tradition whose logic might very well extend, as Allen Roberts suggests in his preface, beyond the "three corners" region. It is this focus upon historically attuned artistry in a complex cultural region that makes *Makishi,* the publication, of relevance to all those—students, scholars, curators, and collectors—who are interested in Central and Southern Africa, African artistry in general, and masquerades in particular.

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