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Feast Ladle (Wunkermian), unknown Dan artist

Arnold Lehman: What looks like a large spoon at the left side of this case was not meant to serve food.

William Siegmann: It was rather meant as a kind of ceremonial emblem that would have indicated the status of a person in the community, in this case, a woman who was being honored for her generosity and her hospitality.

Arnold Lehman: The Dan people of Liberia honor cultural values like hospitality with elaborate feasts and public performances. This wooden ladle was carved by a man, but used by a woman at such a feast.

William Siegmann: The woman who danced with this ladle would have carried it (filled, traditionally, with uncooked rice that she would have scattered to her chickens) just to show that she was a particularly generous woman. Today, the bowl is actually usually filled either with peanuts in the shell or small penny candies that are tossed to the children in the community, to show her generosity.

Arnold Lehman: The peaceful face carved into the handle is an idealized portrait of a beautiful Dan woman. Her half-closed eyes symbolize serenity and tranquility. The elegant hairstyle is a symbol of high social status.

In 1926 Alberto Giacometti, the Swiss artist known for his tall, slender human figures, made a massive, five-foot-tall sculpture called *Spoon Woman* inspired by ladles like this one. Brooklyn-based artist Myrah Brown Green understands why the ladle inspired him.

Myrah Brown Green: He loved the abstractness of the imagery of them; he loved the fullness of them. I could understand how he may have envisioned these ladles, because when I look at one of them, I see fertility, I see giving, I see reciprocity and fullness that a mother can give. For me, even though it has an abstract nature, it shows the connection between women and the universe and bringing forth fruit.

Arnold Lehman: Just to the right is a similar ladle, this one with the head of a cow. It would have represented a woman's generosity in killing a cow for a funeral feast.

For more information about these objects, be sure to visit www.brooklynmuseum.org