

**1070**

*Chief's Chair, unknown Chokwe artist*

**William Siegmann:** The size of this chair would seem to indicate that it might have been made for a child, but it's actually made for a chief. The question is, then, why is it so small? Well, traditionally, Africans tended to use stools, which were meant to be very low to the ground.

**Arnold Lehman:** Lavishly decorated European-style chairs were first brought to Angola by Portuguese traders in the sixteenth century. As European-made imports, these objects acquired great prestige in Africa. So Africans adapted the design of the imported chair to their own standards, creating new chairs that were closer to the ground. Unaccustomed to reclining, they embellished the backs with protruding carved designs.

**William Siegmann:** The chair was brought to the Brooklyn Museum in 1922, and at that point, it served as inspiration for the manufacture of garden benches that were modeled after this chair. So in a sense this chair has gone full circle. It is a style that originated in Europe, it went to Africa, it was transformed in Africa for use there, brought to America, and transformed once again for use in an American context.