

1095

Vessel, Magdalene Anyango N. Odundo

Arnold Lehman: It is tempting to try to understand this piece in a ceremonial or utilitarian context, like so many of the other objects in these galleries. However, it was made as a contemporary, Western-style artwork, to be sold and used solely for aesthetic purposes. By calling it *Vessel*, the artist—Magdalene Odundo—plays with the tension between traditional functionality and the Western concept of art for art's sake. Magdalene Odundo was born in Kenya and educated in India and England. She has studied pottery in India, the American Southwest, Mexico, and Japan. But curator William Siegmann notes that Odundo's artwork remains firmly rooted in her Kenyan heritage.

William Siegmann: Her grandmother was a traditional potter, and she built pots using the coil technique, which is the way that Magdalene builds her pots today. Traditional pottery in this area would have been done with a reduced oxygen content, so that it would have given a blackened metallic sheen to the pottery. And this is exactly what Odundo does today.

Arnold Lehman: Deciding to include works by contemporary African artists in these galleries is a departure from traditional ways of exhibiting African art.

William Siegmann: One of the questions is whether works by African artists should be represented in the contemporary galleries or in the African galleries. Because if we incorporate them into the African galleries, are we ghettoizing African artists by relegating them to one particular set of galleries? On the other hand, if we do not incorporate contemporary art into these galleries, are we suggesting that African art ended with the beginning of the Second World War?