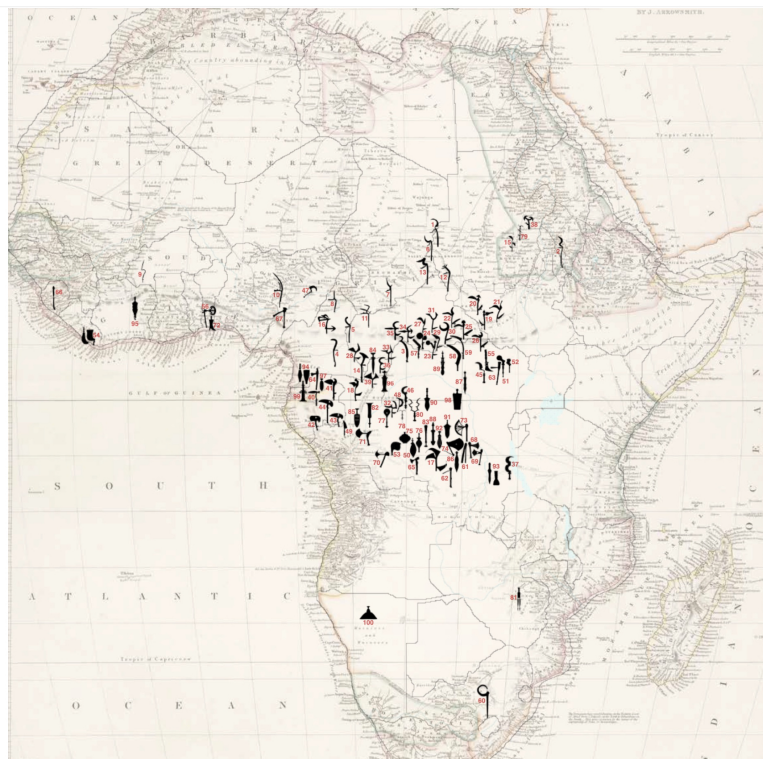


New Book: 100 African Blades

100 Knives From 55 Collections

March 02, 2021
By: Ethan Rider



I love a good African art book. While I enjoy digesting the new information and unique perspective that each one offers, I'm not ashamed to admit that looking at the pictures is my favourite part. One of my regular activities is going to my library and choosing a book I haven't picked up in a long time and just flipping through it to remind myself of the works of art inside—it never gets old!

But when it comes to African knives, I don't always find much content. Many African art books have no knives at all, and many others have just a few examples, often grouped together in the back, as if they are some sort of alternate content only worthy of the appendix.

Of course, there are exceptions—books like 'African Arms and Armor' (Spring, 1993), 'The African Throwing Knife' (Westerdijk, 1988), and 'Les Couteaux de Jet' (2 vols., Lefebvre, 2019, 2020) showcase nothing but knives, and can be comprehensive and encyclopedic. Exhibition catalogues like 'Striking Iron' (Fowler, 2019) and 'Fatal Beauty' (2 vols., Felix, 2009, 2013) can be packed with photos and information.

But for me, the ideal book on African knives has always been 'De Fer et de Fierté' (Elsen, 2003), because it dedicated one full page for each knife photo. This reminded me of the African art books that I liked so much with the beautiful pictures, where the works of art could really be appreciated. The only limitation to the Fierté catalogue is that all of the pieces come from a single collection.



Ga'anda Prestige Sceptre Inspired by a Throwing Knife, Nigeria. Unknown Artist
Early 20th Century
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Kreish / Adio / Bongo / Sere Pere or Mokoongo Throwing Knife, South Sudan. Unknown Artist
Before 1858
Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford





Fantasy Knife, City of Kalemie, Southeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unknown Artist
1880–1910



Baule Prestige Knife in Sheath, Ivory Coast. Unknown Artist
19th Century

And that is where the idea for my new book arose. I wanted to create something that I hadn't seen before—a book on African knives that presents each piece as a work of high art and showcases objects from many collections. I didn't want to repeat the extensive historical and cultural information presented elsewhere, and I didn't want to compete with the encyclopedic editions that showcase every type and variation. I wanted a carefully curated, limited selection of objects coming from collections all over the world, and I am thrilled with the finished product, 100 blades from 55 Collections.

The blades showcased in the book come from museums, private collections, and art dealers. Many of them have never before been seen by the public, much less published. Some of them were hiding in plain sight, like two fantastic throwing knives from the British Museum that have been on display for years, but had never been photographed, and thus never previously published.



Tiv Prestige Axe, Nigeria. Unknown Artist
Early 20th Century



Fang *Ntsakh* or *Fa* Short Sword with Sheath, Gabon, Guinea or Cameroon. Unknown Artist
Late 19th Century

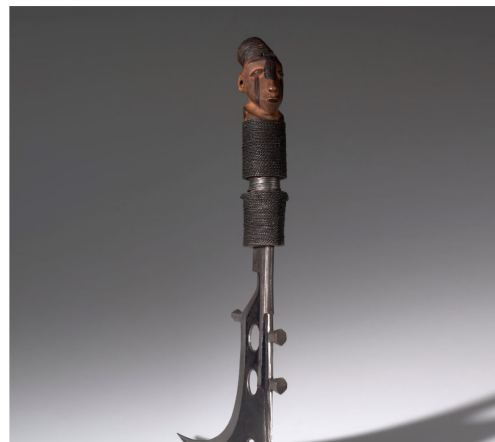
Some of the blades bear historical significance, such as the Mangbetu blade shown on the cover. Acquired in 1910 during Lang and Chapin's American Museum Congo Expedition (1909-15), the knife was originally a part of a male/female pair (the cover piece being the female). In 1968, the museum split the pair and traded the female to another museum, which then closed in 1988. Considering that the male half of the pair was prominently displayed with a full-page colour photo in the AMNH's 'African Reflections' book, the fact that the other half of the pair was simply floating around in the marketplace seems unbelievable.



100 AFRICAN BLADES

FROM 55 COLLECTIONS

BY ETHAN RIDER





Mangbetu *Emambele*, *Nagata*, *Trumbash*, or *Dupa* Cephalomorphic Prestige Knife, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unknown Artist 1910



Mangbetu Knife, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unknown Artist [American Museum of Natural History](#)

'100 African Blades: 100 Knives From 55 Collections' can be ordered from [100 African Blades](#).



Ethan Rider

[Ethan Rider](#) is an African art dealer from Oakland, California who has been in the business since 2004. In 2011, he focused his business on two specific niches: African metalwork (particularly knives) and terracotta. His second book is slated for publication this year, showcasing 100 knives from more than 50 collections. Previously, he authored 'Something Magical: The Kwagh-Hir of the Tiv' (2018), and 'The Fantastic African Blades of Tilman Hebeisen' (2018).

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