

Elements of the African Aesthetic

Resemblance to a human being:

African artists praise a carved figure by saying that it "looks like a human being." Artists seldom portray particular people, actual animals, or the actual form of invisible spirits. Rather, they aim to portray ideas about reality, spiritual or human, and express these ideas through human or animal images. **Luminosity:**

The lustrously smooth surface of most African figural sculpture, often embellished with decorative scarification, indicates beautifully shining, healthy skin. Figures with rough surfaces and deformities are intended to appear ugly and morally flawed. **Self-composure:**

The person who is composed behaves in a measured and rational way; he or she is controlled, proud, dignified, and cool. **Youthfulness:**

A youthful appearance connotes vigor, productiveness, fertility, and an ability to labor. Illness and deformity are rarely depicted because they are signs of evil. **Clarity of form and detail, complexity of composition, balance and symmetry, smoothness of finish:**

African artists place a high value on fine workmanship and mastery of the medium. (Reference: Susan M. Vogel, *African Aesthetics*, New York: Center for African Art, 1986).