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# Phyllis Galemba: Maske



## Synopsis

The clothes we wear invariably telegraph information about our identity, our place in society and the stories we wish to convey about ourselves. The fantastically colorful costumes specific to African and Caribbean rituals and celebrations go several steps further, transforming ordinary people into mythic figures and magicians, tricksters and gods, and symbolizing the roles their wearers play in the ancient dramas that form the cornerstones of their cultural heritage. Phyllis Galembo began photographing the characters and costumes of African masquerade in Nigeria in 1985, and since then she has continued developing her theme throughout Africa and the Caribbean. This volume collects 108 thrilling carnival photographs from Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Zambia and Haiti. In magnificent color shots, Galembo's subjects pose in striped bodysuits that cover the entire body, including the face; or outfits made entirely of bunched greenery; or a lacquered wooden mask topped with a headdress featuring full-body models of other characters; or an oversize misshapen animal head and plywood wings. The carnival characters, rooted in African religion and spirituality, are presented in chapters organized by tribal or carnival tradition and are accompanied by Galembo's personal commentary, shedding light on the characters and costumes portrayed, and on the events in which they play a pivotal role. *Maske* is a serious contribution to ethnographic study, a photo-essay about fashion and an assembly of superb images.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"If there is any book out there right now that truly justifies why art and photo books still exist, it's got

to be Phyllis Galembo's Maske. I love this book!" --D. Scot Miller, San Francisco Bay Guardian

Phyllis Galembo is professor of art at the University of Albany, State University of New York. Her photographs have been exhibited at institutions around the world, including the American Museum of Natural History, New York; Fashion Institute of Technology, New York; George Eastman House, Rochester, New York; Kröller-Müller Factory, Paris; Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna; San Francisco Airport Museum; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York; Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C.; Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs, New York; and Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography. Her work has been collected by institutions, including the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; New York Public Library; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Rockefeller Foundation, New York; and Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut. In 1994, Galembo received a Senior Fulbright Research Award to photograph Kings, Chiefs and Women of Power: Images from Nigeria. She received a Hasselblad Masters Award in 2001 and an Artist-in-Residence Fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts in 2010. Galembo's previous books include *Divine Inspiration: From Benin to Bahia* (1993), *Vodou: Visions and Voices of Haiti* (1998), and *Dressed for Thrills: 100 Years of Halloween Costumes and Masquerade* (2002). Chika Okeke-Agulu is associate professor of art history in the Department of Art and Archaeology, a core faculty member at the Center for African American Studies, and a member of the executive board of the Program in African Studies, for Princeton University. He was the Robert Sterling Clark Visiting Professor, Williams College, and is a fellow of the Clark Institute. He cocurated *Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa* (Whitechapel, London, 1995), *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994* (Museum Villa Stuck, Munich, 2001), and *Who Knows Tomorrow* (Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 2010). His writings on African and African Diaspora art and artists have appeared in journals, including *South Atlantic Quarterly*; *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*; *Glendora Review*; *African Arts*; and *Art South Africa*. He is coauthor (with Okwui Enwezor) of *Contemporary African Art Since 1980* (2009), coeditor of *Who Knows Tomorrow* (2010), and editor of *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*. --This text refers to an alternate Hardcover edition.

Phyllis Galembo is to be celebrated for her superlative photos of African costumery, thereby showing us the fantastic, fabulous, imaginative genius of the people she photographs. I'm in awe of such creativity. I must say, though, that the book was a disappointment. Its production did not live

up to its subject. The photos themselves are fine - although I did expect a somewhat larger format, but there is something flat & ordinary about the dust jacket; the white background, the lack-luster font, in fact the general design, but, more important to me, is the inconsistent photo display. Some pages have photos on each side, most have photos on one side, with a blank reverse side. Its unprofessional appearance cheapens the presentation and gives the impression that the publisher wanted to make the book thicker than (to my mind) it should rightfully be. This is simply to forewarn, not to discourage, would-be buyers. The costumes are delightful, inventive, utterly wonderful. In spite of my somewhat serious quibbles with the production of the book, I'm still glad to have it.

Hardcover, Plain Card Boards with Photographic DJ, 9.5" x 9", 208 Pages, 94 full-page color photos of masquerade masks & costumes, (71 depictions from Africa and 23 from Haiti), 7 Pages of text. Introduction by Chika Okeke-Agulu Original pricing : 30 Pounds (UK), \$45 (US) Published by Chris Boot, 2010. From the back cover : " 'Maske' is an album of Phyllis Galembo's powerful and thrilling masquerade photographs from Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Zambia, and Haiti." And these portraits are indeed powerful and thrilling...Okay - It's true that the photographs are posed and static, and it's also true that there is too little in the way of descriptions of each costume, and...yes...the presentation is a little spare and unbalanced....BUT.....the images themselves are striking and visceral works of art. The photographs have a wonderful dreamlike quality, as if they were tribal art seen through the lens of David Lynch. The book features vibrant, beautifully lit mask and costume art, modeled by almost entirely anonymous people, captured in a photographic museum which appeals to the tribal art lover in me, but which I honestly believe will appeal to all lovers of art and photography. Please see past the books faults to appreciate a simply wonderful book, which has immediately become one of my favorite portrayals of "Man As Art".

Arrived fast, not over packaged. So glad I bought this book; the costumes in it are inspiring and truly creative, made from all sorts of materials that one in our material western world might otherwise overlook. A very inspirational photo book for anyone interested in fashion, costumes and other cultures.

A truly beautiful, awesome book. It has a depth I wasn't expecting. There are a few photo books I will treasure for life; this is one of them.

These photos are mesmerizing. The book is a welcome addition to the documentation of mask and

masquerade traditions. The only flaw is the lack of specifics about what each masks is evoking or attempting to represent. We are left only with mystery and wonder.

Great ideas come from great images. This book has something as I've never seen them though I've been to quite a few museums. The images are clear and speak for themselves. Had an imagination high just by flipping through the pages. Good way to submerge into a new world.

It is an amazing book

The photos are incredible and the stories that go with them are intriguing. Would highly recommend this book to anyone!

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Phyllis Galembo: Maske When You Look Out the Window: How Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Built a Community

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