



MAKING IT BETTER

Folk Arts in Pennsylvania Today

From an interview conducted with Temujin Ekunfeo in March, 2009.

What are *Ileke Masso*? “*Ileke Masso* are used to adorn orisha and at least twice to adorn the priest. The initiation into the priesthood is a seven day process, cut down from the 16 day process. On the 2nd day of that initiation it is called the middle day, and you get all dressed up in special clothes made for you and a crown made with beads and you wear all of that and at least 6-8 strands of beads.”

What is the hook, or *garabato*? “In Nigeria, among the Yoruba, it would be called the *ogo*, or *ago*. It’s *Elegba*’s wand to pull things and people towards him. And when priests of *Elegba* are initiated they have one of these and they wear it and/or carry it and when they are in possession, when the orisha or *Elegba* has taken over their body, they dance with this as a wand, and sometimes they will even dance with it as a hook around their neck, so that their hands are free to do other things. This is a piece that, although it would be on a shrine, you might get a chance to see it off of a shrine, if someone was dancing for *Elegba*... Now usually with *Elegba* there are four colors, either red and black or black and white, and I decided to in this one represent using both these colors... If it is in black and white, it represents a particular *Elegba* called *Afrá* which has a certain connection to deities of the Dahomeyan. This particular *Elegba* is the companion of the orisha *Babalu Ayé*. So the *Afrá* colors are black and white, all the rest are red and black. So this one is a blend. Traditional. Appropriate. But still a blend.”

“[The type of whisk we have in the exhibit is called] *Afesa* (whirlwind) It is for *Oya*, who is deity of the wind (*Afefe*). ...If its air moving, it’s *Oya*. From the first breath you take, to the last breath you take—it’s *Oya*...”

“*Oya*, was one of the wives of *Shango*. Not the first one, but one of the wives of *Shango*. She is without question, the icon of female independence. “I love you baby, but I don’t need you.” *Shango* showed up in her kingdom one time and said “I’m *Shango* and I’m king!” And *Oya* said, “So I guess you have to know that you’re standing in my palace, you did notice that, right? And that I’m the queen here? And I didn’t have to marry you or any other man to be queen, I AM the queen here?” And *Shango* was like, “I’ve powers”. “Like What?” “Well I can spit fire” And so he did. *Oya* wasn’t impressed, cause she could do it too. “So, I could call thunder and lightening from the sky.” And he did. Well, *Oya* wasn’t impressed, because she could do that too. But then he went to his drummers and he played one of his rhythms and then he started to dance.... And she was like, he’s looking pretty good. “Oh all right then.... And I want you to understand that I will marry you because you are cute and a good dancer, not because I’m afraid of you. We are going to be equals in this relationship and if you got a problem with that, there’s the door you came in. Don’t let it hit you on the way out.” And he decided that he was get with the program and he married her. So *Oya*, in addition to being the first breath you take and the last breath you take, and all the wind, the air, that we swim in, she represents the fact that women need to realize their individual power. If you have a man in your life, he is not your boss, he is your equal. If you want him to think that way, then that’s your fault for letting him get away with it. Cause you need to straighten him out, tell him to get it together. And that’s *Oya*.”