

Songye Nkisi statue and Songye statues
Democratic Republic of the Congo

LEMPERTZ
1845

ARTCURIAL
Communiqué de presse

AFRICAN & OCEANIC ART

The Jean-Jacques Rotthier Collection

8 September 2026
Paris

Following the success of the sale of **Jean-Jacques Rotthier's (1932–2009) Egyptian antiquities collection**, presented on 12 May in the Archaeology & Arts of the Orient sale, which totalled nearly €1.5 million with 100% of lots sold, Artcurial, in partnership with Lempertz, will present this Belgian collector's **African and Oceanic art collection** on 8 September, during Parcours des Mondes in Paris.

Assembled from the 1970s onwards, the collection pays tribute to the discerning eye of a discreet yet deeply passionate collector. Regularly called upon for major exhibitions through loans, the collection is now revealed for the first time in its full breadth.

Shaped by extensive travels across Africa — from Ethiopia to Ghana and Mali, where Jean-Jacques Rotthier lived for a time — and enriched over decades through dialogue with leading specialists such as Bernard de Grunne and Pierre Darteville, the African art collection stands within the tradition of the great twentieth-century private collections.



JEAN-JACQUES ROTTHIER COLLECTION

Of African and Oceanic Art

Djenné statues
Inner Delta Niger, Mali



This collection ranks among the most remarkable private ensembles assembled in recent decades in the field of African art.

This first chapter brings together approximately one hundred of the collection's most important works — a corpus of exceptional quality and remarkable density, offering a first glimpse into the richness of the ensemble. The consistency and refinement of Jean-Jacques Rotthier's selection reveal the eye and sensibility of this great Belgian connoisseur, whose acquisitions, made primarily in Belgium, originate largely from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Throughout the collection emerges an approach free from speculation or ostentation, guided instead by curiosity, sensitivity, and an uncompromising eye. In this respect, the Jean-Jacques Rotthier Collection echoes the words of Frans Olbrechts, who wrote: "to seek not gold, ivory, ebony, or radium, but that which may one day bring Africa greater renown than all the mineral treasures concealed within its soil: its art and its artists."

Among the highlights of the collection is an exceptional group of four Songye figures, including a monumental figure with oversized head bristling with copper nails, ringed neck, gaping mouth, and eyes framed by a delicate network of carved eyelashes (est. €40,000–60,000).

Also featured is a magnificent Mwanza-style ceremonial staff from the Luba kingdoms, surmounted by two female figures (est. €20,000–30,000). A large ensemble of terracottas from the ancient Djenné-Jeno cultures of Mali, together with works from the Nok culture of Nigeria, further reflects Jean-Jacques Rotthier's insatiable curiosity and constant search for beauty and rarity. Completing this exceptional ensemble is a rare and important janiform Kuyu figure (est. €40,000–60,000), collected in the Congo by Aristide Courtois between 1910 and 1930; today, only one other example is known, preserved in the collections of the Dapper Foundation.

"Beyond the quality of the works themselves, what emerges here is a singular vision — a coherence and exacting eye that give this collection its true strength."

- Stéphane Aubert
Artcurial Vice-Président
Auctioneer



A very early Luba scepter or Kibango
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Early to mid-19th century
H.: 150 cm
Estimate : € 20,000 - 30,000



Djenné maternity,
Inner Niger delta, Mali,
11th-16th century
H.: 42 cm
Estimate: € 10,000 - 15,000



A very early Luba scepter or
Kibango (detail)



An important eastern kuyu janus figure,
Alima Plateau,
Democratic Republic of the Congo
H.: 90 cm
Estimate : € 40,000 - 60,000



Songye figure,
Democratic Republic of the Congo
H.: 85 cm
Estimate : € 40,000 - 60,000



Songye Nkisi figure,
Democratic Republic of the Congo
H.: 95 cm
Estimate : € 50,000 - 80,000

AN EXCEPTIONAL GROUP OF FOUR SONGYE STATUES



Songye statues
Democratic Republic of the Congo

These four exceptional monumental sculptures embody the power, complexity, and spiritual richness of Songye thought. Conceived as communal protectors, these Minkishi (singular: Nkishi) served as intermediaries between the human and spirit worlds. While smaller figures were intended for individual use, monumental statues such as the four from the Jean-Jacques Rothier Collection protected entire communities and often remained active across several generations.

The creation of an Nkishi arose from a close collaboration between sculptor and ritual specialist. A master sculptor first carved the figure, privileging geometric harmony and the subtle refinement of its curves. The selection of a renowned sculptor enhanced the prestige of both the patrons and the

wider community. A ritual specialist (nganga) would then endow the sculpture with spiritual power by inserting sacred medicinal substances (bishimba) into the abdominal cavities and summit horns.

Each added element carried symbolic meaning. The large cowrie-shell eyes granted the figures clairvoyance, enabling them to perceive invisible threats, while the iron nails placed at the navel paid tribute to the historic alliance between blacksmithing and political authority. Often named after celebrated chiefs, these communal figures built their reputations through their ability to bring fertility, healing, and protection to their people.



Useful informations

Auction :

African & Oceanic Art
8 September 2026 at Artcurial, Paris

BRUSSELS

From 8 to 14 June 2026

Lempertz
Grote Hertstraat 6,
Rue du Grand Cerf
1000 Bruxelles

PARIS

From 4 to 8 September 2026
11.00 AM - 18.00 PM

Artcurial
7 Rond-Point
des Champs-Élysées Marcel Dassault
75008 Paris

Specialists

Bernard de Grunne
Jan-Joris Visser

An important eastern kuyu janus figure,
Alima Plateau,
Democratic Republic of the Congo
H.: 90 cm
Estimate : € 40,000 - 60,0000

About Artcurial

Founded in 2002, Artcurial, the leading auction house in France, based in Paris, strengthened its position in 2025 as a major player on the international art market.

With its four sales venues in Paris, Monaco, Marrakech, and Basel, the house achieved a total sales volume of €208.5 million in 2025. It covers all major collecting categories: Fine Arts, Decorative Arts, Classic Cars, Jewellery, Collectible Watches, Fine Wines and Spirits. Artcurial has a strong

www.artcurial.com

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