

# *Mestre Didi*

291 GRAND STREET | SEPTEMBER 4 - OCTOBER 26, 2024



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# Mestre Didi

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James Cohan is pleased to present *Mestre Didi*, an exhibition of twelve totemic multimedia sculptures by the late Brazilian artist, Mestre Didi (Salvador, Bahia, 1917- 2013), on view at 291 Grand Street from September 4 through October 26, 2024. This exhibition is made in collaboration with Simões de Assis.

Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, better known as Mestre Didi (Master Didi), was an influential Afro-Brazilian artist, spiritual leader, and writer. Didi's singular oeuvre is closely linked to the *Candomblé* universe, a West African diasporic religion that developed in Brazil as a result of the transatlantic slave trade and with which Didi maintained a profound and generative relationship throughout his life. Followers of *Candomblé* believe in a pantheon of gods, known as *Orixás*, ancestral figures imbued with the divine energy of nature that mediate between the human and the Supreme.

Didi's sculptures, made predominantly from organic materials such as palm fronds, painted leather, cowrie shells, and colored beads, are direct heirs to the traditional art and liturgical objects of the *Candomblé*, as well as symbolic representations of these ancestral entities. Elements from the Yoruba imaginary and other West African visual cultures, such as birds, snakes, spears, and flames, are reworked by the artist into evocative pieces that echo the deities and mythic narratives of these religions. Articulated like trees sprouting from ornate

concave circular bases, Didi's works possess an elegant verticality and joyous gestural expression.

Didi's creative output, while steeped in the spiritual and inextricably tied to his position as a high priest, was not intended for direct religious use. Didi's sculptures are creative interpretations and aesthetic celebrations of his cultural-spiritual practice. In Didi's work, the encounter between tradition and African heritage unified with the vernacular of contemporary art brings to life a semi-abstract conceptual and emotional vocabulary that fuses past and present to restore and renew life.

Mestre Didi has been featured in important solo and group exhibitions at institutions such as the Pinacoteca do Estado de Sao Paulo, the Afro Brazil Museum, the Sao Paulo Museum of Modern Art; the Oscar Niemeyer Museum, Curitiba; the Bahia Museum of Modern Art, Salvador; the National Historical Museum and the Rio de Janeiro Museum of Modern Art, in addition to being featured in the Bahia Biennial and the 23rd Sao Paulo Biennial. Abroad, he has exhibited in Valencia, Milan, Frankfurt, London, Paris, Accra, Dakar, Miami, New York and Washington. His works are featured in prominent institutional collections, including the Bahia Museum of Modern Art, the Sao Paulo Museum of Modern Art, and the Sao Paulo Assis Chateaubriand Museum of Art.





*Erè (Child deity)*, 2008  
Mixed media, palm tree trunk,  
painted leather, shells, and beads  
68 57/64 x 19 11/16 x 7 3/32 in.  
175 x 50 x 18 cm  
(JCG17531)









*Iyawo Sango: ose ati eye meji (Xangô priestess with double ax and birds)*, 2011  
Mixed media, palm tree trunk, painted leather, shells, and beads  
61 1/32 x 9 27/32 x 9 27/32 in.  
155 x 25 x 25 cm  
(JCG17528)









*Untitled*, 1990  
Mixed media, palm tree trunk, painted  
leather, shells and beads  
50 x 12 1/4 x 5 1/2 in.  
127 x 31 x 14 cm  
(JCG17526)



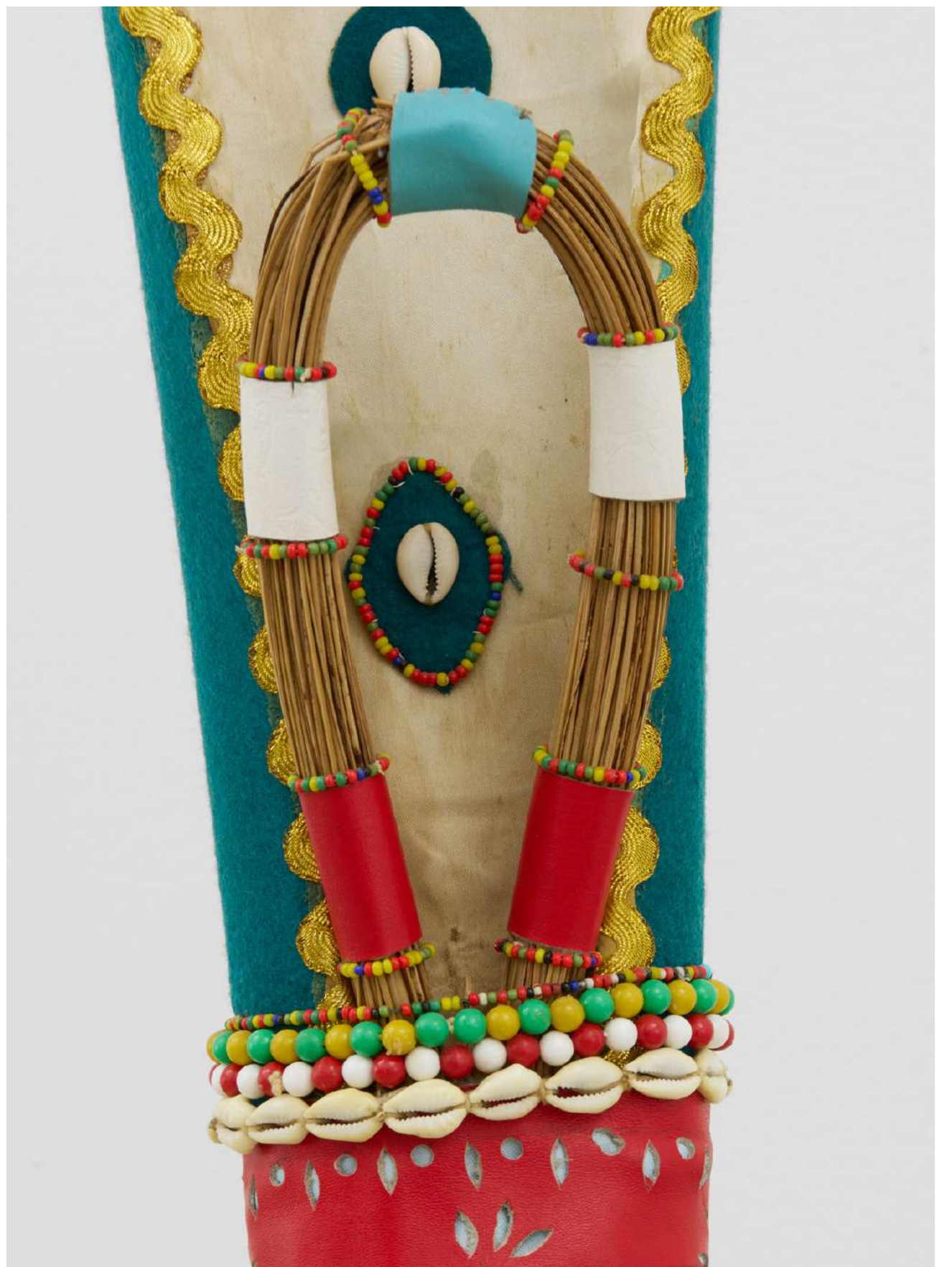






*Ope L'odô (River Palm)*, 2007  
Mixed media, palm tree trunk, painted leather,  
shells, and beads  
59 9/16 x 10 3/4 x 10 3/4 in.  
152 x 27 x 27 cm  
(JCG17530)



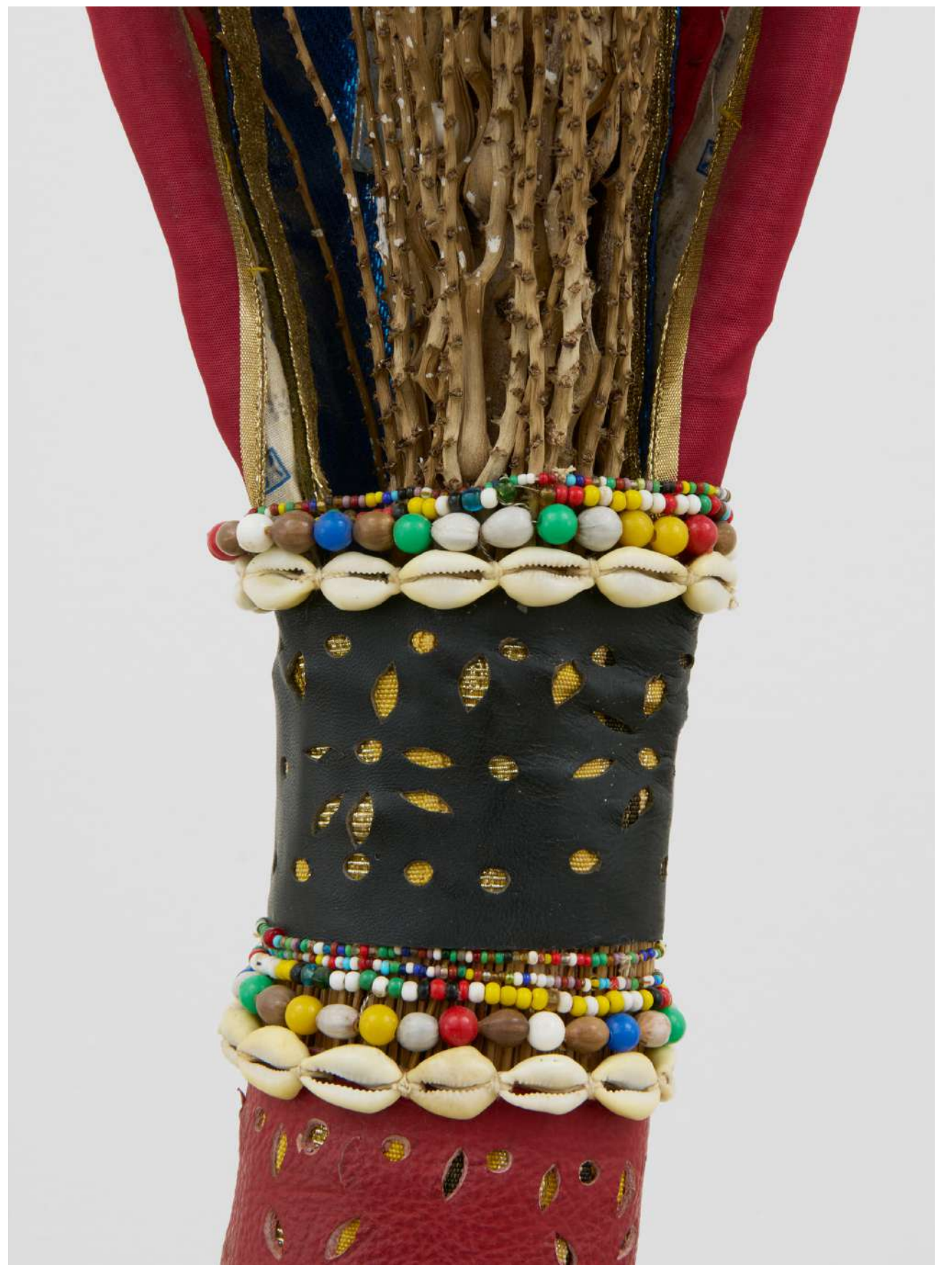






*Ope Awo Ibo (Mysterious palm from the jungle)*, 2004/2011  
Mixed media, palm tree trunk, painted leather, shells, and beads  
51 5/8 x 14 1/8 x 11 3/4 in.  
131 x 36 x 30 cm  
(JCG17524)









*Untitled*, n.d.  
Mixed media, palm tree trunk,  
painted leather, shells, and beads  
39 3/8 x 6 x 11 4/5 in.  
100 x 15 x 30 cm  
(JCG17527)









*Igi nlá ejo meji ati eye kan lori*  
(*Big tree with two serpents and*  
*a bird in the canopy*), 2010  
Mixed media, palm tree trunk,  
painted leather, shells, and beads  
34 1/4 x 14 5/8 x 5 7/8 in.  
87 x 37 x 15 cm  
(JCG17529)



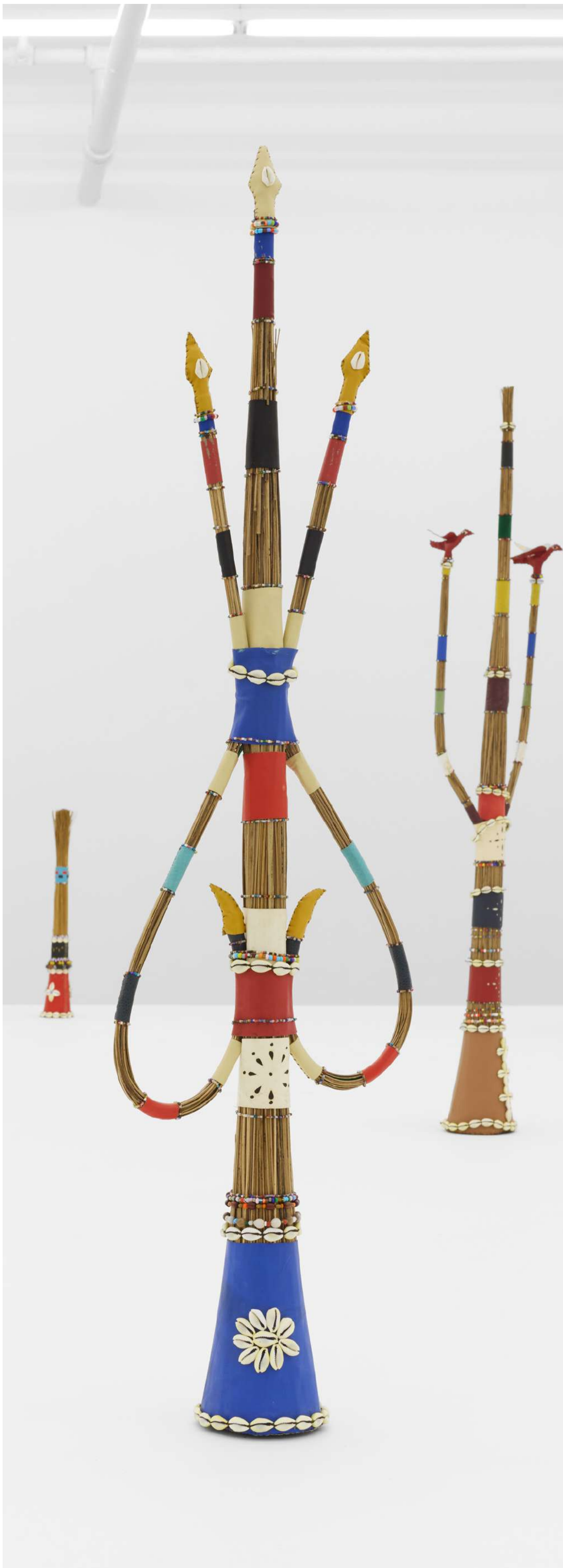






*Untitled*, n.d.  
Mixed media, palm tree trunk,  
painted leather, shells, and beads  
43 7/10 x 11 4/5 x 4 18/25 in.  
111 x 30 x 12 cm  
(JCG17532)













*Opa Baba Ewe (Scepter of the  
Father of Vegetation)*, n.d.  
Mixed media, palm tree trunk,  
painted leather, shells, and beads  
35 1/5 x 6 3/5 x 6 3/5 in.  
89 x 17 x 17 cm  
(JCG17533)









*Opá idari mérin pèlú òkò lókè*  
(Scepter of the four iris with a  
spear on top), n.d.  
Mixed media, palm tree trunk,  
painted leather, shells, and beads  
36 3/5 x 12 1/5 x 4 7/10 in.  
93 x 31 x 12 cm  
(JCG17534)









*Traditional Sasará*, 2003  
Mixed media, palm tree trunk,  
painted leather, shells, and beads  
23 5/8 x 3 3/4 x 3 3/4 in.  
60 x 9.5 x 9.5 cm  
(JCG17525)









Traditional Sasará, 2003  
Mixed media, palm tree trunk,  
painted leather, shells, and beads  
22 5/8 x 4 x 4 in.  
57 x 10 x 10 cm  
(JCG17523)







