

Basic Detail Report



Goldweight in the form of a quadruped, its body encircled by fine bands

Date

ca. 1900-35

Medium

Brass

Description

Between roughly 1400 and 1900, Akan traders in Ghana and the Ivory Coast used collections of small brass weights to verify equal measures of gold dust. Akan craftsmen fashioned these weights using the lost wax method - a process which results in only one cast object, each a unique work. The artist forms the object out of softened wax, covers the form with slip and clay, and finally heats the covered form in order to melt the wax and replace it with molten brass. After the cast object cools, it is cleaned - leaving no mold to use again. Goldweights fall into two broad categories: figurative and geometric. The Akan traditionally associated figurative weights with particular proverbs, an art form that pervades Akan visual and verbal culture. Among the Akan, objects as diverse as patterned kente cloths and staff finials reference proverbs. In a social arena, one may be praised for his ability to recall proverbs and introduce them in public debate. Despite this close verbal-visual relationship, figurative goldweights often allude to particular proverbs, but the weights are not used as a vehicle for verbal communication or significance; they merely weigh gold. Although the patterns of geometric weights may have names, they are not associated with proverbs. This weight may refer to the proverb: " 'If I had known' always comes too late." A proverb that parallels the modern American adage, "Hindsight is always 20/20." Suggested readings: Eric de Kolb, *Ashanti Goldweights*. New York: Gallery d'Hautbarr, 1968; and Christine Fox, *Asante Brass Casting*. Cambridge: African Studies Centre, Cambridge University, 1988.

Dimensions

1 1/8 × 2 1/8 × 3/8 inches (2.9 × 5.4 × 1 cm)