to create and pleasure taken in fashioning objects, even (or even especially) things for everyday and practical use. This is a concept of art that has repeatedly been adopted by curators in many modern art museums. (The Museum of Modern Art in New York City exhibits a helicopter, kitchen utensils, and industrial designs, though not in the same galleries as their Cézannes and Matisses, and the Guggenheim once showed everyday tools in a gallery near an exhibit of Kandinskys). Many large museums have long included "decorative arts" segregated into separate wings or sections but almost never mingled amid their paintings and sculptures. What is striking here is that such everyday or practical objects are interspersed with more ordinarily exalted ones. I am reminded of the innovative efforts by Dr. Albert G. Barnes who exhibited Renoirs and Cézannes interspersed with metal house fixtures and assorted furniture and exhibited Modiglianis, Matisses and Picassos juxtaposed with African sculpture (Wattenmaker 1993: 17, 21). A photograph of the Perls' (who donated Benin art to the Metropolitan) apartment shows African art beneath a Modigliani nude (Halle 1993: 100). I am reminded too of the cartoonist Drucker who made fun of the fact that in a kind of inverse form of misplaced liberalism, some Europeans and Americans seem bent on considering any exotic (non-Western) crafts as "art." In a New Yorker magazine cartoon Drucker shows one Eskimo (today we are told to call them Inuit) carving a polar bear in ivory and talking to a dejected comrade who is sewing snowboots. The carver assures the bootmaker: "What you are making is art too – everything we make is art."

Even in terms of exhibiting sub-Saharan African art, the heterogeneity of objects is striking. Previous African exhibits and catalogues have almost always been organized either around the diverse output of a particular ethnic group or narrow geographic area or around some particular theme such as kingship, secrecy, or the depiction of animals, around some genre such as stools, weapons, pottery or headwear, or around some medium such as gold or ivory, or to demonstrate the taste, wealth, and dedication (obsession) of a particular collector. The present selection most closely resembles this last, in this case the collector being the curator, Tom Phillips. The sheer diversity of objects defies any other common denominator, and while the demonstration of wealth itself is obviously not an objective, Phillips does confess to relishing the chase after an object which is savoured by all collectors (*RA Magazine* 1995), and the immense prestige of the Royal Academy has guaranteed that some of the most distinguished museums and collectors have provided famous objects to validate Phillips' eclectic taste by their association with what else is shown. Such a varied selection of objects in large part does correct certain imbalances encouraged in many earlier surveys and exhibits of African art. Three examples well illustrate this. Pierre Meauzé (director of the World Exhibition of Negro Art in Dakar and Paris in 1965–66 and former curator of the Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie in Paris) presents exclusively sculpture in his survey of African art (1967). William Fagg (one of the doyens of the study of African art and the former Deputy Keeper of the African collections in the British Museum) presents almost entirely figurative sculpture and masks in his "Tribes and Forms in African Art" (1965). In a similar vein, Susan Vogel and Francine N'Diaye made such choices in their selection of "African Masterpieces from the Musée de l'Homme" (1985). Other examples from surveys of African art by distinguished scholars and collectors could be cited. Despite the diversity illustrated in this catalogue, 44 % of the objects shown either are human figures or incorporate human figures; if one includes heads and masks the amount reaches 60 %. Several have commented on Western predilections toward the human figure; certainly Western tastes in African art have favoured the realistic figure and face both in collecting and in setting high prices (Rubin 1984: 7, 17). The relatively low number of masks in the catalogue may relate to what Halle claims is a Western aversion toward the ambiguity and unreassuring ambivalence manifest by identity-blurring objects (Halle 1993: 170). Despite his claims to be more unfettered by previously held critical biases toward the types of African objects shown, Phillips' selection of objects involves few items of apparel, few textiles (2 %), few tools (8 %), few clay pots (4 %), and little jewellery (5 %).

Another issue worth pondering about art in Africa concerns how Africans themselves view such objects as museum pieces to be preserved and exhibited. Today, museums have been established in many African nations. Unlike some museums in Europe and America, which attempt to span the arts of all cultures and societies during all times (sometimes presumptuously and always reflecting their own cultural biases), museums in Africa are almost exclusively devoted to the works produced within the borders of the country they serve. Art collections in Africa have become the "patrimony" of a country, physical embodiments of a precarious, newly invented nationhood. They epitomize