

York show is first display of African treasures

By JUDY SINGER

Seventy-two pieces of art from Central Africa never before seen on this continent are now on display at the York gallery in the Ross building.

The art pieces are from the Royal Ontario Museum and have been gathering dust in the museum since missionaries collected them at the turn of the century. Zdenka Volavkova, a York art history professor, is primarily responsible for the exhibit. Volavkova tackled the difficult job of cataloguing these unknown pieces, and the current show and catalogue are the results of a year's exhausting research.

In African societies, there is no concept of the separation of the arts. The boundary which exists between various art forms in Western cultures has no meaning in African ideological spheres, and all these forms are integrated. This is made possible because art is the life of the tribal community and the entire community is involved in the creation of an object.

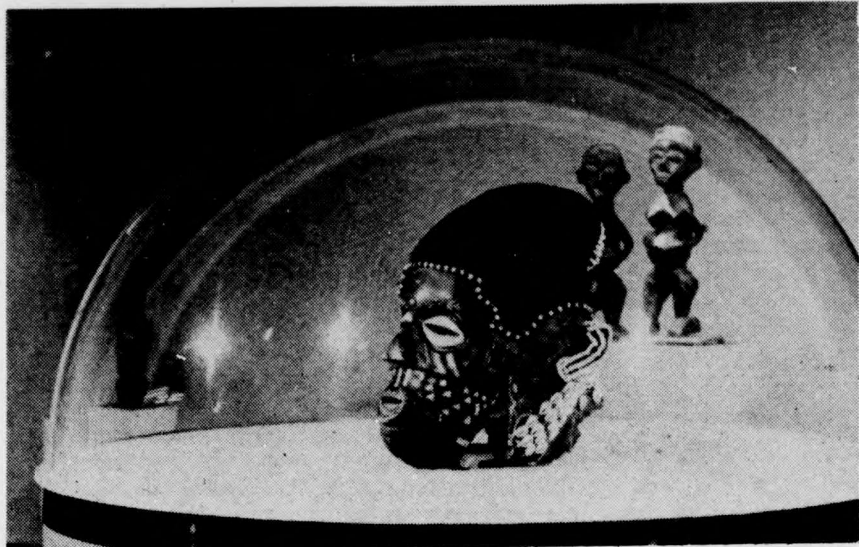
The relationship of the artist and user also differs in that they do not incorporate two distinctive entities. One

man, for example, may carve an object while the person who receives it may do a design on it according to his own wishes. The user, then, is directly involved in the work of art. In the more specific cases of the wearers of masks, the user loses his own identity in order to take on the identity of the art object itself and in so doing, embodies the spirit of the object.

The African artist is primarily concerned with the perfection of types and motifs that have survived over many years and is not preoccupied with the idea of innovation of new art forms. A man, for example, may do a sculpture of a type that was done hundreds of years ago and instead of trying to develop a new type, he will try to perfect this old one.

These African works clearly illustrate a beautiful feeling for design. All of the patterns are non-repetitive, although they may not seem so, and they subtly change in sequence when the whole is taken into consideration. The African mats are a good example of this idea.

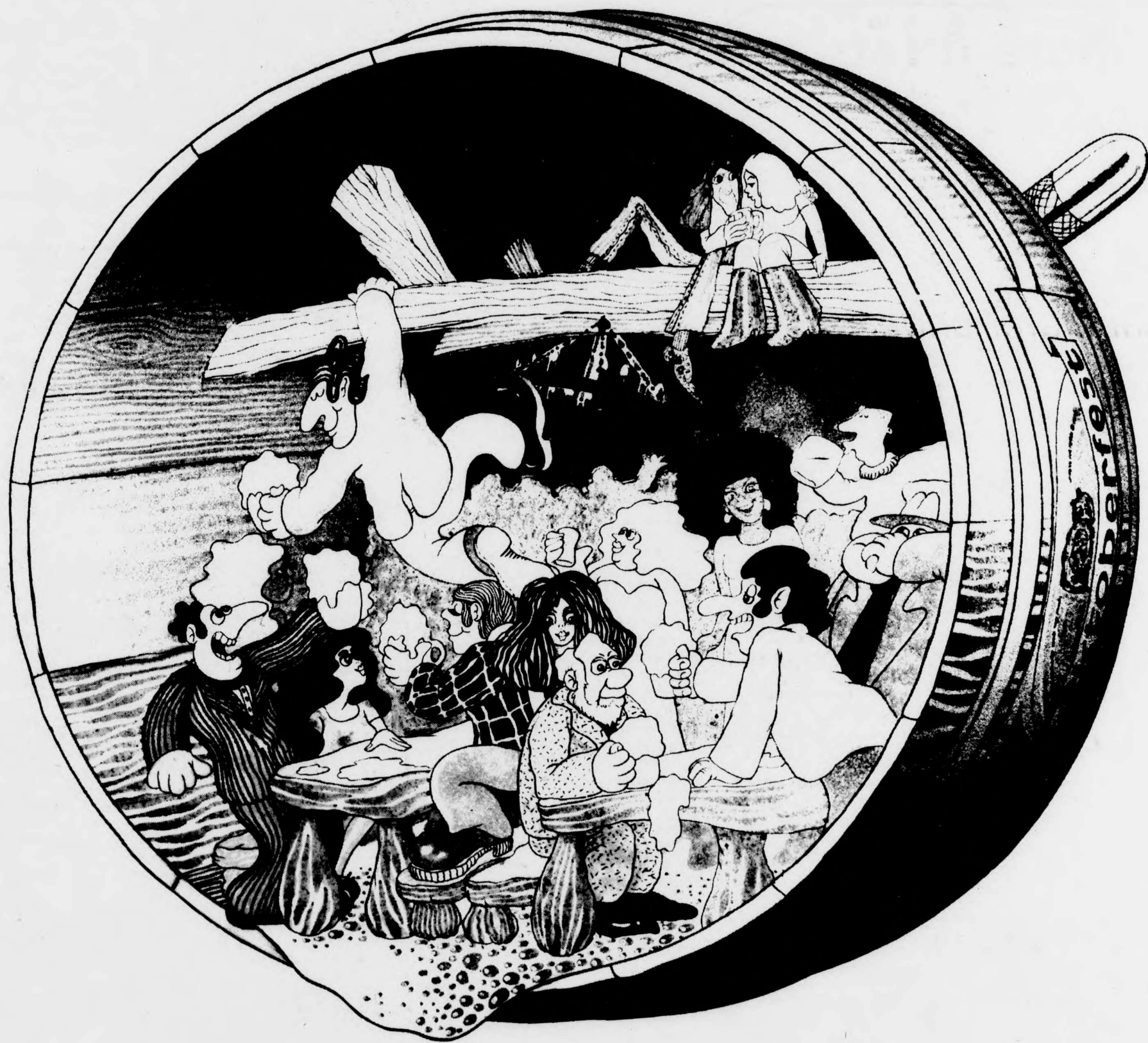
The show runs until Jan. 31, gallery hours; Mon. - Fri. 11 - 4:30, Sun. 2 - 5.



Lerrick Starr photo

An African mask is an example of art which forces the user to become involved in the work.

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