

MASV IEN



MARTIN DOUSTAR

MASKEN

EXPRESSION OF THE SPIRITS

With a contribution by

CATERINA MAGNI

Masken

1. Plural form of German *Maske*, Masks

Of uncertain origin. A Germanic word from Old Frankish, from the stem *Maska* (black, to blacken the face), believed to be of Pre-Indo-European origin giving rise to words meaning “witch, wizard, sorcerer”.

Dame mit Masken, 1912, Hermann Stenner

Courtesy of Kunsthalle Bielefeld





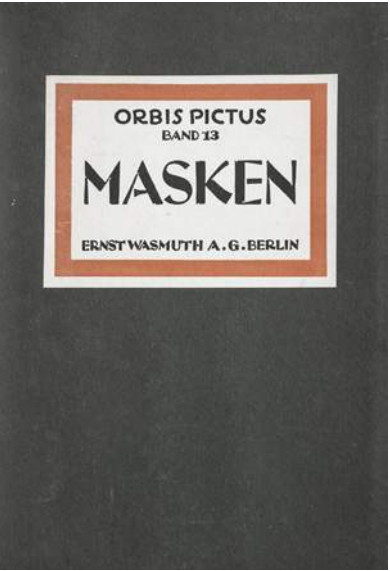
For this second glance at the representation of the human face across cultures I have decided to show an important selection of masks, illustrating the universality and diversity of a practice that goes back to the mists of time, and its permanency through the ages.

This selection is highly personal, the result of encounters but also a cognitive approach in pursuit of truly authentic forms of art and beauty, without necessarily following the trends of the market.

This is also inevitably a choice, the reflection of a taste, inherited from the path traced by the Avant-Garde artists, collectors and dealers of the early twentieth century, and expressed in the very title of this catalogue, in reference to early publications and German expressionism.

The masks I included in this catalogue respond to this particular aesthetics, through their startling expressiveness and fascinating modernity; but they also share what i believe are common qualities attributed to all great works of art : clarity and eloquence.

An original essay by Caterina Magni about the extraordinary masks of the Olmec civilization, with several unpublished masks of importance, will conclude this overview.



Martin Doustar



CATALOGUE



THE ANCIENT WORLD

1 A SUMERIAN AMULET

Sumer, Early Dynastic Period, Southern Mesopotamia, 2900-2300 BC
Alabaster
Width : 3,7 cm

Provenance Private collection, London

“History begins at Sumer”, to borrow Samuel Noah Kramer’s expression...

The Sumerian civilization was one of the most ancient and important culture to emerge from Mesopotamia. Sumer is also known as the site of early development of writing, progressing from a stage of proto-writing in the mid 4th millennium BC to writing proper in the 3rd millennium BC, at the dawn of the Dynastic Period, celebrated by the reign of legendary ruler Gilgamesh.

This charming maskette dates from this latter period. Probably depicting the head of an orant, it presents some typical Sumerian features : heart-shaped face with large eye sockets and high pronounced cheeks. A furrow delineates the thin and delicate eyebrows. Now missing, the eyes were certainly once inlaid with steatite, and two holes through the ears, now damaged, were used for hanging the amulet.



2 AN EGYPTIAN FUNERARY MASK

Egypt, Late Period, 600-300 BC
Wood, pigments, bronze, stone
Height : 26,6 cm

Provenance Ex. Gilbert collection, France, acquired ca. 1970
Charles Ede, London

The ancient Egyptians believed that they had more than one soul, and that an individual's physical body needed to be preserved because the body and the souls would need to be re-united in the afterlife. The fragile mummified body needed protection – both physical and spiritual. The coffin provided a box in which the body could be placed to prevent it from being damaged.

From the the lid of an anthropoid coffin, this beautiful funerary mask was carved in wood with great sensibility. The face is painted in green color of the resurrection, and the eyes inlaid with black steatite and finely framed in bronze sockets with extending cosmetic lines. Great attention was devoted to feature the eyes as they were thought to be a “window” which would enable the dead to look out onto the world. The expression is serene, and a gentle smile seems to emerge from the lips.



3 AN EXCEPTIONAL BRONZE MASK

Northern Iran, Early 1st Millenium BC or before
Copper alloy
Height : 13,5 cm

Provenance David Aaron, London
 Acher Eskenasy, Paris

Very few bronze or copper masks related to the ancient cultures of the Near East have been found. This exceptional example probably originates from the northeastern part of Iran, or Bactrian, even though the mask features closely resemble some faces of bronze idols from Luristan and Elam, in southwestern Iran. This provenance is also reinforced by the metallurgic analysis performed by Dr. Peter Northover from the University of Oxford, who observed that a leaded copper arsenic or copper-arsenic-antimony alloy was used for the manufacture of the mask. This alloy has notably a long history of use in the northeastern region of Iran and adjacent parts of Central Asia.

The facial features are delicately balanced, with almond-shaped eyes wide open, brows and lips in high relief, and details such as nostrils and philtrum subtly suggested. The hemispherical ears were cast separately and attached with two rivets. The surface of the mask presents an eutectic patina highly penetrated by corrosion, with heavy deposits still visible on the back of the mask, consistent with the operation of long term natural processes in a burial environment. Etching and some residual cold work indicate that the mask was cast close to shape but experienced one or more cycles of working and annealing during hand finishing after casting.

This fascinating object, both universal and timeless, was certainly made for a noble of high rank, and probably intended to follow him in the tomb, as a funerary mask.

For another unique pre-Achaemenid Iranian bronze mask with riveted cast elements, see *Bronzes Iraniens*, Collection Jean-Paul Barbier, Paris, Hotel Drouot, 27 May 1970, lot 28 (cover and page 50).



4 AN IMPORTANT SIBERIAN MASKETTE

Ostyak people, West Siberia, Ob River region, 600-900 AD
Bronze alloy
Height : 10,2 cm

Provenance Private collection, Scandinavia

Siberia is considered to be the heartland of shamanism. The anthropologist Piers Vitebsky notes : “The word *shaman* comes from the language of the Evenk, a small Tungus-speaking group of hunters and reindeer herders in Siberia. It was first used only to designate a religious specialist from this region.” Siberian shamanism is involved in the cult of the dead, of ancestors and mountains, and in rituals of animal sacrifice. The deepest meaning or message of Siberian animism is to balance man and nature. In Siberian cosmology, the universe is associated with animal concepts, such as the elk for the Middleworld, the bear for the Master of the Animals, or, among the Evenks, for the ethnogenic father. In addition, the universe has a tripartite structure consisting of the Upper, Middle, and Lower worlds, each one being a replica (*imago mundi*) of the other two. (...) The Siberian shaman’s soul is said to be able to leave the body and travel to other parts of the cosmos, particularly to an upper world in the sky and a lower world underground. (Vitebsky, 1995 : 10-11)
Shamans, as it is well known, play several social roles in their respective societies (curing the sick, fortune-telling, or conducting sacrifices etc.), but all of them share the common element that shamans somehow contact the spirits. L. E. Sullivan put it well : “Shamans are experts in the movements of the human soul, because they not only control the ecstasy of their own souls but specialize in the knowledge and care for others’ souls, as well.” (Sullivan, 1994).

This highly important bronze maskette probably represents a mighty warrior, called *bogatyr*, or a shaman from the Ob-Ugrian “Giant Heroes” cult. Depicted with stylized arms and legs in lower part, wearing a high top headdress and face decorated with vertical striped tattoos, this exceptionally fine amulet can be considered as an essential testimony on ancient rituals related to shamanism. In modern Siberia, these rare objects are still highly prized for their magical properties and cultural significance.

Biblio. : *The attributes and power of the shaman*, Lawrence E. Sullivan (1994)
The Shaman, Piers Vitebsky (1995), p. 10-11

Head, Kazimir Malevich, 1928-1929
Courtesy of the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg





AFRICA



5 A MASK OF THE NIGHT SOCIETY, *TROH*

Bangwa, Valley of Fontem, Grasslands region, Cameroon, 19th century
Wood, dark crusty patina
Height : 37 cm

Provenance Jacques Kerchache, Paris
Private collection, Belgium

In his book of reference “*Arts anciens du Cameroun*”, Pierre Harter writes about the secret society known as *Troh* : “Each dignitary of the Troh owns a wooden mask-helmet, inherited from his predecessor, which constitutes a collection of nine masks per chiefdom and only seven per sub-chiefdom. These are the symbols of power in the same way as the society itself. They are so powerful and dangerous that one cannot wear them directly on the head, but only on the shoulders. The very sight of these masks is deemed capable to transmit a strong evil energy to the non-initiated, that’s why they inspire such a terror to the crowd. The mask keeper only is authorized to touch them and move them around, after he went through certain rites. For generations, they were stored in his hut, above the roof where, like all objects from this region, they progressively developed thick laminated layers of soot, enhancing their power. They were exceptionally exhibited during important funerals and successions. In the past, the Troh held night meetings in one of the huts of the palace, where each member was coated with kaolin and camwood (*Baphia nitida*). In the minds of the common people, these sessions mainly involved practices of sorcery, or the killing of a convicted person.” (1986 : 303)
Pierre Harter identified two types of masks, a very cubistic style, typically Bangwa, and a more naturalistic one, influenced by the Bamileke. Inside this corpus, we observe, however, a wide variety of form. While this impressive example shares some common characteristics with the majority of masks of the Night Society, like the dreadful expression with large exaggerated facial features, bilobed headdress and thick crusty patina, it also shows a few particularities.
The face is highly stylized and geometrical, with the eyes, brows, mouth and nose carved in hemispherical and elliptical shapes. The repetition of these themes on several layers creates a feeling of interpenetration with forms expanding and flowing in perfect harmony. The mouth, wide open along the lower edge and showing teeth filled down to points, unusual for this type of masks, seems to have been borrowed from the zoomorphic masks of the Bekom neighbours.

Biblio. : *Arts anciens du Cameroun*, Pierre Harter, 1986, p. 303.
Cameroun : arts traditionnels, Bettina von Lintig, 2006, p. 101 (for a *Troh* society mask with similar notched eyebrows)



6 A RARE *KIAVIA* MASK

Mambila People, Adamawa Region, Northern Cameroon, circa 1900
Wood, pigments, seed of Job (Coix lachryma-jobi), string
Height : 36,5 cm

Provenance Collected in the Northern Region of British Cameroon before 1959-61
Private collection, United Kingdom

Bibliography *African Masks from the Barbier-Mueller collection*, 1997, n° 59
Sotheby's, *Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie*, 14 December 2011, Paris, lot 46

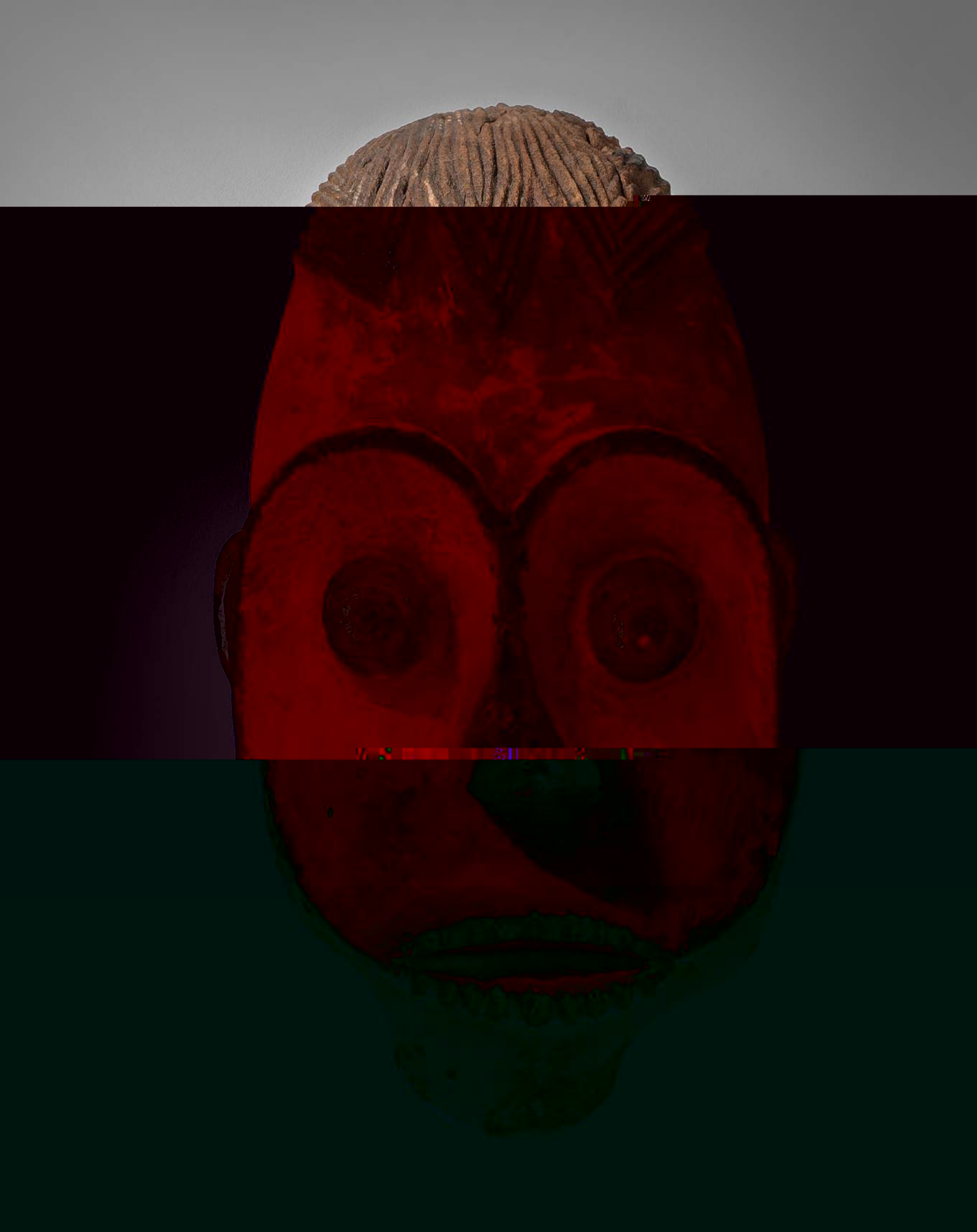
This Mambila head crest is from an extremely tight corpus of Mambila masks, known essentially after the example in the collection of the Musée Barbier-Mueller and another closely related mask sold by Sotheby's Paris in 2011. About the latter, the catalogue description says : “the bold expressionism of the face is emphasized by the pictorial dimension of the sharp color swatches, resulting in a work of absolute modernity.”

According to Tamara Northern, referring to the Barbier-Mueller mask, “our current knowledge on the art of the Mambila is unfortunately incomplete and superficial. Masks appeared at the end of both annual cycles of planting and of harvest, instants when they danced, carried by and for the men. [This mask] seems to represent a human face in the cup-shaped form which is found on the faces of the wooden figures of the ancestors, and it has the tubular and protruding eyes which are admitted usual on zoomorphic masks of the Mambila. In this case, the red colour obtained with some powder of the wood of Kampuchea predominates.” According to Hahner-Herzog, Kecskési and Vajda (1997: 154), the use of this precious powder, imported from the Western forests, could represent the solidarity of lineages, as in neighbouring Grasslands. These masks with human features called *kiavia* accompanied the important zoomorphic *suaga* masks-helmets.

The Mambila live in the south of the Adamawa Highlands, on both sides of the border between the northwest of Cameroon (north of Bamum region) and Nigeria (Benue Valley and surroundings). It is in the confluence of these major styles that we should situate the remarkable conception of this rare mask.

In comparison with the two masks cited previously, the present example possesses the particularity of having the eyes decorated with red seeds of job, accentuating the protruding effect and the staring expression.

Biblio. : *African Masks from the Barbier-Mueller collection*, Hahner-Herzog, Kecskési and Vajda, 1997, p. 154



7 A MAGNIFICENT ROYAL HEADCREST

Fumban, Bamum people, Grasslands, Northwest Cameroon, 19th century
Wood
Height : 65 cm

Provenance With missionary Paul Gebauer in Cameroon, circa 1931-1961
Arnaud Harty de Pierrebourg, Douala (till 1970)
Mireille de Pierrebourg, Paris
Bernd Muhlack, Kiel
Important private collection, New York

The rediscovery of this extraordinary mask, unpublished, broadens a small but essential corpus of royal masks and offers a new insight on the ancient art of the Bamum. But before examining the sculptural qualities of this object, we must place it in the context in which it was created, to understand its cultural significance, and importance in the evolution of art in the 20th century. For almost five centuries Fumban was the capital of the Kingdom of Bamum, the largest of Cameroon Grasslands. An important artistic culture developed over this long period, particularly in the first half of the 19th century, reaching its apex during the reign of King Njoya (circa 1893-1923).



King Njoya of Bamum, Fumban, photographed by a German officer circa 1910



An iconic photo from 1907, taken in Fumban by Austrian trader and explorer Rudolf Oldenburg, shows a group of seven giant figures surrounded by a dense crowd of spectators, in front of Njoya's palace. They are wearing impressive costumes and tall headcrests over their heads, known as *tungunga*. These royal masks were danced by the members of the *nsoro* and *patambouo* secret societies at the beginning of the dry season. Used in pairs, evoking the images of a deceased king and his wife, they were held on the top of the head and affixed by a fiber construction hidden underneath a raffia frill. The first example of this rare and highly important corpus of masks was collected in 1911 by German geographer Franz Thorbecke, for the Reiss-Museum Mannheim. However, the superficial patina of the object indicates it was most probably a replacement mask carved as a diplomatic gift. From 1884 till 1918, the Bamum became voluntarily part of German *Kamerun* and placed themselves under German protection. During this prolific period which saw the modernization of certain elements of the old *Mbum* society, such as the creation of a script to record Bamum's history, or the introduction of new housing construction techniques, Germans and inhabitants of the Kingdom lived in mutual understanding. King Njoya remained loyal to his German overlords who in turn respected the local culture and his rights as king. Things changed with the beginning of World War I... In 1914, the Allies invaded German Kamerun as part of the West African campaign and Fumban was captured by British Colonel E. H. Gorges a year later. At the end of the war, Germany's colonial possessions including *Kamerun* were divided between Great Britain and France, and the kingdom of Bamum thus fell under French rule. In 1923, the brutal occupation by the new colonial empire brought to an end the reign of Njoya, banned his script and dismantled his kingdom. From that date onwards a few of these ancient royal headcrests appeared in Europe, such as the female mask which was exhibited in Naples in 1934.

Right : *Patambouo* dancers in the courtyard of Njoya's palace, Fumban
Photography by Rudolf Oldenburg, circa 1904
Courtesy of the Kunst Historisches Museum, Wien. VF 49900





The mask above is an extremely old testimony of the skills and creative genius of the ancient Bamum workshops. It can clearly be attributed to one of the master carvers who worked for the royal court of Fumban in the 19th century. The surface of the mask, whose neck was partly devoured by insects, indicates the object remained in the village over a very long period of time, and was used intermittently.

When American missionary George Schwab arrived in Fumban in 1930, the production of masks for the colonial market was already flourishing. Nonetheless, as did French researcher Henri Labouret a few years later, he was able to collect one old mask (Geary, 2011: plate 13), on behalf of the Peabody Museum of Harvard. This particular *tungunga* (*tu*: head and *ngunga*: dance; literally: *head for the dance*) and the present mask both show strong similarities with the headcrests photographed by Oldenburg in the courtyard of Njoya's palace in 1904: an oval-shaped face with a flat nose, prominent ears carved like a reversed "U", arched eyebrows and large riveted eyes - all characteristic features of the face suggesting it was carved by the same hand, or in the same workshop.

The present headcrest furthermore definitely stands apart from the other masks of the corpus, by its sculptural qualities but also its great age. Here, the carver has succeeded in creating a powerful face of startling monumentality, regal presence, and hypnotic expressiveness, and, at the same time, he gave it a twist of elegance and gracefulness, with this tall narrow neck and heavy headdress which rises in the air, stretching the head backward dynamically yet with a sense of lightness.

By looking closely at this headdress, it appears that it is intricately decorated with stylized tarantulas. The Bamum, like the Bamileke, believe their ancestors return to the earth when they depart, and because spiders burrow into the earth they are revered as the link between the living and the ancestors.

Certainly, this head evokes the sculptures of Picasso depicting his young mistress Marie-Thérèse Walter, but more importantly it echoes the influence of early Cameroon art on German expressionism and particularly on the work of Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and Ludwig Kirchner.

Another important male mask carved probably in the same workshop in the late 19th century, photographed by Oldenburg in 1912 and offered by Charles Ratton in 1935, is now in the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris. (Harter, 1986: 167)

For a much discussed *tungunga* in the *Ndam nji Mare* style, previously in the collection of French painter Maurice Vlaminck, refer to Sotheby's, the sale of Saul & Marsha Stanoff collection, 17 May 2007, lot 22.

Biblio. : *Arts anciens du Cameroun*,
Pierre Harter, 1986, p. 156, 167
Bamum, Christraud M. Geary, 2011
p. 107, plate 13

1. Die Brücke, 1912
Cover page by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

2. *Ascension*, Otto Freundlich, 1929/1969
©Adam Rzepka-Centre Pompidou, Paris



8 A RARE VILI SKULL MASK

Vili, Southern Gabon, 19th century
Human skull, wood, earth, natural gum, mirror
Height : 22 cm

| | |
|------------|---|
| Provenance | Comte Baudouin de Grunne, Bruxelles Bernard de Grunne, Bruxelles |
| Exhibition | <i>Le crâne</i> , Musée Cantini, Marseille, 13 mars-15 mai 1972, n° 115 (illustrated in the catalogue) |

The Vili are a people of Central Africa, settled between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the south of Gabon. Especially renowned for their impressive and extended corpus of sculptures, there is little information about the preservation and ritualization of skulls and only a handful of examples in public collections. However, some common features emerge. We observed that the skulls, all very ancient, were initially buried for a relatively short period, then exhumed to be decorated. Like the numerous Vili-Kongo *nkisi* fetishes, they bear magical charges in cavities modeled around the eyes and the forehead, and sealed with mirrors. The nose is generally sculpted in wood and fixed with a natural resin. On the present example, shaped like a mask, the skull was cut along the coronal suture.

Biblio. : *Le Crâne*, Henri Gastaut, Musée Cantini, Marseille 1972, n°115.
Schadelkult, Wieczorec-Rosendahl, Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, 2011, p. 369.



9 AN IMPORTANT *IDIOK EKPO* MASK

Ibibio People, Southeast Nigeria, 19th century
Wood, pigments, rattan
Height : 49 cm

Provenance Bill and Joanna Nicholson, Toronto

Publication *Guérison*, Jo de Buck, Bruxelles, 2013

The Ibibio people live primarily in southeast Nigeria, between the Niger Delta and the Cross River. They are regarded as the most ancient of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria. According to Robert McKeon, the Ibibio are probably the indigenous natives from whom most small tribes of the southeast coastal region are descended. The early settlement of the Ibibio in the area led to the development of a number of sub-clans, notably the Anang, the Efik, and the Oron. Percy A. Talbot suggests that by 7000 BC permanent settlement of some of the ethnic groups in Ibibio land had already begun and notes that the Ibibio language is probably the most ancient of all the semi Bantu languages (1923: 5)

Ibibio society consists of villages, each of which belongs to a larger unit known as the “Clan.” The clan was often named after the founder of the first village in the area. Each village is ruled by a group of elders and influential members from important families. The duties of a head include the settlement of disputes among members of the families, the villages or the clan. He is not only a true mediator but also performs sacrifices at the ancestors’ shrine for the well being of the families in the village.

The social system is enforced by an ancient secret society, called *Ekpo* (literally “dead ancestor”), which plays a political, legislative, judiciary and religious role in the village. Members of the *Ekpo* society act as messengers of the spirits, they are always masked when performing their policing duties.

The dark-coloured or black masks - *idiok* - symbolised the evil, immoral souls of people condemned to perpetual suffering and disease as ghosts. Those impersonating *idiok* spirits, danced at night, performing their intimidating horror-like show with wild erratic movements, intended to scare the spectators and therefore assure their obedience.

The present mask, of great size and considerable age, is illustrating the distorted and suffering face afflicted by the Noma disease. The crusty patina, dark, with traces of white and reg pigments on both sides of the mask consistent with ritual offerings, indicates the mask was used as a personified fetish as well. Clumps of unruly raffia were attached on the edge of the mask, emphasizing its striking expressiveness. The perfect construction coupled with its unique qualities make this mask a very singular sculpture in the large corpus of Ibibio masks, and the probable masterpiece of the genre, between fearful tribalism and plain modernity.

Biblio. : Percy A. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 1923, p. 5





Les demoiselles d'Avignon, Pablo Picasso, 1907

The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Firenze
© Succession Picasso - SABAM Belgium 2015



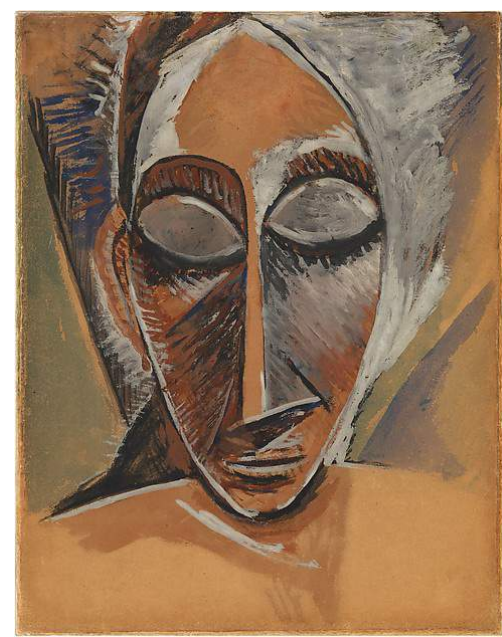
10 A SUPERB DAN MASK

Dan people, Man region, Ivory Coast, 19th century
Wood, charcoal
Height : 20 cm

Provenance Private collection, United Kingdom

This very fine Dan mask of petite size and great age has a lot in common with another female mask published in *The Arts of the Dan in West Africa* (Fischer & Himmelheber, 1984, p. 31). In both cases, the narrow face has a dry red surface with remnants of black paint around the mouth, nose and eyes. A vertical scar and eyebrows are sketchily painted on the forehead. Carved in light wood with delicate proportions, the back of the mask indicates that a very small tool was used by the artist, who achieved to express softness and beauty with a great economy of means.

Biblio. : *The Arts of the Dan in West Africa*, Eberhard Fischer & Hans Himmelheber (1984), Rietberg Museum, p. 31.



Head of a Woman, Pablo Picasso, 1907
Promised Gift from the Leonard A. Lauder Collec-
tion. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York ©
Succession Picasso - SABAM Belgium 2015



11 AN IMPORTANT DAN MASK

Northern Dan region, Ivory Coast, 19th century
Wood, black paint
Height : 22,5 cm

Provenance Paul Guillaume, Paris
Charles Ratton, Paris
Mathias Komor, New York
Acquired from the above in Dec. 6. 1958
Important private collection, New York

In their reference volume about Dan masks, Fischer and Himmelheber explain that “the masquerades of the Dan are the spirits manifest. They wish to help men and to advise them, revealing this desire through a dream to the man -never a woman- whom they have chosen. (...) The spirit is operative in the face mask whether it is worn or not. (...) Dan masks have either human or animal features, or sometimes a combination of both. Their forms may be rendered in a realistic manner, or they may be stylized to such a degree that hardly any natural prototype can be recognized. We can distinguish eleven generic mask types, each of which included a variety of sub-types.” (1984 : 8-9)

This very old mask, of perfect classicism and supreme elegance, is a superlative example of the type known as “runner-mask”, which participates of the *Gunyege*, the racing masquerade only found in the Northern Dan. *Gunyege* masks have an oval face with large, round eye-holes, to expand the field of vision during the race, and a high rounded forehead. The present example has a deep, black glossy patina, and old traces of rat bites along the eyes contour, attesting the great age of the mask.

Biblio. : *The Arts of the Dan in West Africa*, Eberhard Fischer & Hans Himmelheber (1984), Rietberg Museum, Zurich, p. 8-9
Masques, Christiane Falgayrettes-Leveau, Musée Dapper (1995), p. 203, for a comparable mask.



12 A KUBA MASK, *NGAADY MWAASH*

Kuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 19th century
Wood, pigments, beads, string, fiber, cauris
Height : 26,5 cm

Provenance Sotheby’s, London, 11 Feb. 1963, lot 71
Collection of Veena and Peter Schnell, Zurich

The Kuba Kingdom was a pre-colonial kingdom of Central Africa that flourished between the 17th and 19th centuries, in the region bordered by the Sankuru, Lulua, and Kasai rivers, in the southeast of the modern-day Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Kingdom reached its apex in the mid-19th century, some time before Europeans reached the area, in 1884. The Kuba are known for their beautiful and sophisticated masquerades, featuring exquisite geometric patterns, stunning fabrics, seeds, beads and shells. They have often been described as a people who cannot bear to leave a surface without ornament. One of the main masking tradition is the royal masquerade, centered on three different masks described as royal - *Mwaash ambooy mu shall*, *Bwoom* and *Ngady mwaash*. These are interpreted as representing the king, the commoner and the wife of Mwaash ambooy respectively (see following page).

This early *ngaady mwaash* mask is of classical type. It has a long face with stretched and split eyes, a diamond-shape mouth, and an overall decoration of geometrical pattern, typically dominated by triangular form, and outlined by very thin incisions. The forehead is bordered with a strip made of raphia, and adorned with cauris and a row of beads. The eyebrows are indicated with two arched rows of turquoise blue beads ; and a band of precious white and blue beads, characterizing the royal masks, covers the nose and mouth.

The provenance of this mask includes the name of renowned Swiss collectors Veena and Peter Schnell, who started collecting in the early 1950’s. Seeking the advice of well-known experts, such as William Fagg, former curator of the Museum of Mankind in London, they were active over a period of twenty years, acquiring objects from European dealers such as Maria Wyss in Basel, Emil Storrer in Zurich, or William Ohly and Sotheby’s in London.

Biblio. : *Art royal Kuba*, Joseph Cornet (1982), Milan.
Het gelaat van de geesten, Maskers uit het Zairebekken, F. Herreman & C. Petridis (1993), p. 134, for a comparable mask.





Kuba : Bushoong (West-Kasai), Ngaady mwaash, bwoom en moshaambooy te Mushenge, circa 1909
K.M.M.A., Tervuren (E. PH. 9435)

13 A RARE *NDAAKA* MASK

Ituri, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1900-1950
Wood, pigments, fiber, iron
Height : 16,5 cm

Provenance Private collection, United Kingdom

The Ituri region is located in the forested area in northeastern Congo. The masks from this region belong to the Lega complex, and there are a number of recurring formal elements and somehow similar expressions. In his essay “Neighbouring peoples” (2005: 69-71), Dr. Theo Gielen writes : “North of the Lega region, the masks become flatter and the heart shape disappears. What is striking is not the verticality but the width of the composition, the horizontality. The face is wider and this wider shape seems to serve the composition. The plane can be more easily subdivided and results in a rather neutral image because it has no dominant direction.

(...) The flatter plane not only provides space for the indication of the sensory organs, but frequently also for a polychrome surface treatment featuring detailed coloured motifs. This patina adds a material, spiritual and medium dimension. The coloured dots often represent traces of hands or hand impressions or the spoors left by supernatural creatures.

The relation between the formal elements and the surface treatment of these masks deviates from the Lega technique giving the Ituri masks an independant and expressive character. (...)

These masks are obviously more communicative and, in this form, have a more social function and are less the secret symbols of knowledge, hence the large open and usually toothed mouth and open eyes. Formally, they are performance mask and they also appear to be depictions of a transe state. (...)

The surface treatment confirms their secret function, because the repetitive coloured dots betray a strongly introvert autism (perseveration). The fact also that those masks have remained virtually unknown to outsiders until recently seems to confirm this theory.”

Biblio. : *Het gelaat van de geesten, Maskers uit het Zairebekken*, F. Herreman & C. Petridis (1993), n° 106
Ceci n'est pas un masque, Theo Gielen (2005), p. 68-71



14 A SUPERB *GITENGA* MASK

Pende, Democratic Republic of Congo, 1900-1950
Wood, pigments, feathers, fiber, rattan, cord
Diameter : 32 cm

Provenance Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert, Paris

“Although the *Minganji* face masks make an appearance at a wide variety of occasions (such as the investiture ritual of a local chief, or the construction of a new chief’s residence), their primary role is as guardian of the initiation encampment. The *Gitenga* mask is described as the grandfather or the chief of the *Minganji*. It serves as a representation of the sun, a symbol of life and regeneration. The *Gitenga* mask thus stands in diametrical opposition to the other *Minganji* characters, which embody death, uncertainty, and darkness.” (Petridis, 1993 : 63-77)

Thsi old *Gitenga* mask has a typical round shape with facial features reduced to total abstraction; it has retained much of his impressive feather headdress, making the perfect synthesis between tribal art and culture, and modern aesthetics.

Biblio. : *Pende Mask Styles*, Constantin Petridis (1993) in *Face of the spirits*, F. Herremann & C. Petridis, p. 63-77



Gitenga dancing in Gungu, circa 1950, photo by André Sochy
Illustrated in *L'art Pende*, Leon de Sousberghe (1958), fig. 5



15 AN IMPORTANT *KAKUUNGU* MASK

Suku, Democratic Republic of Congo, Early 20th century
Wood, pigments, fiber (raphia)
Height : 60 cm without headdress

Provenance Important private collection, Belgium
 Sotheby's Paris, 16 April 2003, lot 112
 Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Collection, Toronto.

In a 1938 letter to Joseph Maes, then curator at the *Musée de Tervuren*, the Jesuit missionary Leon de Beir writes that he's been trying to acquire a *Kakuungu* mask from one of the Yland(S)14(u)-5(k)13(vw)-3(i)-5(i)-5(i)a58(g)8aes,

ut those “fatassarhm (t)-5(a)-5(i)-5(t t)-6(h)4(eir(i))3(a)3(s)5ts breat.s Parting witt thm wgoud mheae ace(r)-10(t)-6(a)9i(n de)-6(a)19(t)-6(.)] TJEMC/Span 𐀀MCID 803 𐀀DC-0.804 Tc0.804 wf204 Lw10 0 0 10 113.696 082.047 Tm𐀀F65𐀀

16 A MAGNIFICENT LUBA MASK

Luba, Democratic Republic of Congo, 1900-1950
Wood, pigments, hair, fiber, cord
Height : 37 cm

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Provenance | Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert, Paris |
| Exhibition | <i>L'art au Futur Antérieur</i> , Musée de Grenoble, 10 july-4 Oct. 2004 <i>Fragments du Vivant</i> , La Monnaie de Paris, 10-24 Sept. 2008 |
| Publication | L'art au Futur Antérieur, Liliane et Michel Durand-Dessert,2004, n° 40 <i>Fragments du Vivant, Sculptures africaines dans la collection Durand-Dessert</i> , Jean-Louis Paudrar, Liliane et Miche Durand-Dessert, 2008, p. 171-172 |

About this showpiece of their collection exhibited in the Musée de Grenoble in 2004, Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert write : “This monkey mask carved in a naturalistic way is a masterpiece in terms of geometrical construction. It is quite hollowed and ends with a part of trapezoidal form figuring the neck. The top of the skull goes down in a triangle shape figuring the arch of the eyebrows. It is striated with transversal curves which join a median line in light relief. The line continues in the middle of the face with the bridge of the nose; the bridge ends with two nostrils joining the middle of the upper chops; the muzzle, wide open on the teeth is of oval shape, and its corners join the lateral parts of the face. The triangle shape of the nose is the same as the forehead except upside down. And the pupils are reminiscent of the nostrils. The oval shape of the eyes is echoed by that of the muzzle. The profile shows the whole geometric perfection even better; the face is concave, the nose is flat and the eyes are engraved rather than carved. Despite the slight concavity of the cheeks, the curve which outlines the arch of the eyebrows continues into an arch to the muzzle. The curve is underlined by the placement of the hair, and it is similar to that of the nose. This mask was certainly carved by a Songye artist for the Luba people; regarding the treatment of plain and striated volumes and surfaces it shows the mastery typical of this ethnic group; the power of the animal, expressed through the projection of the ???, is qualified by the softness of the profile, and a certain sadness in the gaze. The interweaving of masses and volumes is quite elaborated even though the relevance and the sensitivity of the curves are at their highest degree of achievement. This duality expresses the essence of the art – when art reaches the harmony between naturalism and abstraction, the observation of the real and its conceptualization.”



Head of a man, 1947, Max Ernst. Private coll.



17 A RARE *SACHIHONGO* MASK

Mbunda people, Southeastern Angola/Zambia, 19th century
Wood, pigment
Height : 44 cm, width 48,5 cm

Provenance Peter Loebarth collection, Hameln
 Galerie Pierre Robin, Paris
 Private collection, Paris

“*Sachihongo* is an enigmatic ancestral spirit, for, although the chiefly qualities of the mask are obvious, it is also associated with other attributes or abilities. In northwestern Zambia various informants described *Sachihongo* as a chief, while in the literature it has been identified both as a diviner and as a hunter. The association of chiefs with diviners, or their representation as diviners, is not uncommon, particularly on the thrones of Chokwe chiefs. *Sachihongo* as chief and diviner may emphasize the mediatory role of chiefs, who position themselves at a pivotal point between the world of humans and the supernatural realm. Both the Mbunda and other, related groups do indeed create masks that may well represent the reincarnated spirits of diviners.” (Marc L. Felix & Manuel Jordan, 1998 : 117)

This old *Sachihongo* mask is clearly a superlative example, unrivalled in terms of cubistic construction.

A closely related mask is in the collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum.

Biblio. : *Makishi Lya Zambia*, Marc Leo Felix & Manuel Jordan, 1998, p. 85-125, 223-237.



Head and shoulders, Amedeo Modigliani, circa 1913
Collection Paul Alexandre. Inv. 32.9



18 AN IMPORTANT SACHIHONGO MASK

Mbunda people, Southeastern Angola/Zambia, 19th century
Wood, pigments, cord
Height : 56 cm

Provenance Bryan Reeves, London
 Alexandre Bernand, Paris

The Mbunda are a Bantu-speaking people who migrated from northern to southeastern Angola during the Bantu expansion, in the middle of the first millenium, and further east to Zambia in the late 18th century.

In his essay *Mukanda and Makishi* (M. L. Felix & M. Jordan, 1998 : 85-125), Manuel Jordan writes that the Mbunda, like their Chokwe, Luchazi, Lunda and Lwena neighbours, have different masks with the attributes of chiefs. *Sachihongo* is the primordial representation of a chief for the Mbunda, and it is usually worn by relatives of a senior chief on special occasions. “Sachihongo embodies all the qualities and attributes of a chief, visually defined in the unique Mbunda style of carving. The Mbunda are known for creating large wooden masks with full, rounded forms (...). Mbunda carvers favor wide, flat, and round forms that define the facial features dramatically. A stylistic element used almost exclusively by Mbunda maskmakers is the practive of carving deep wrinkles in the forehead above the orbits of the eyes. These two sets of parallel arched lines meet at a sharp angle at a point above the nose. *Sachihongo*, too, wears an elaborate feathered headpiece. Carvers generally add a flat crown as an extension of the head, sometimes decorated with designs, to which the feathers can be attached easily. True to Mbunda style, *Sachihongo* is characterized by “exaggerated” features, such as wide, bulging cheeks and forehead, a large nose, and a pronounced mouth that usually includes carved teeth. A dense fiber beard is commonly attached to the lower edge of the mask.” (1998 : 116-117)

This old and powerful mask shares characteristics common to most Sachihongo masks, nevertheless it is quite unique in the genre. Carved in high relief with extremely large and geometrical features, contrasting with finer details such as the pointed teeth or stylized nostrils, the artist has also divided the face in two parts, each painted in a different color. The white side symbolizes the positive energy, while the red is the evil side, if someone goes on that side of the mask it will harm him.

A comparable mask of the same archetype, with deep carving and chiefly crown is illustrated in *Makishi Iya Zambya* (1998 : 227).

Biblio. : *Makishi Iya Zambia*, Marc Leo Felix & Manuel Jordan, 1998, p. 85-125, 218, 224-237.



19 A SUPERB AND RARE *PWEVO* MASK

Luchazi people, Western Zambia, 20th century
Wood, beads, fabric, fiber, string
Height : 24 cm

Provenance Private collection, France

According to Marc Leo Felix, this sumptuous carving originates from the Luchazi people of Zambia. It is a semi-helmet mask that was worn attached on top of the head of the male dancer during *Mukanda* ceremonies of male initiation. However, it represents a female ancestor of idealized beauty, called *Pwevo*, or *Pwo* in Chokwe neighbouring territories. Of rounded shape with delicate features, the mask bears rare *kangongo* scarification marks, including a series of dots that runs from the forehead to the tip of the nose, *vijingo* rosette motifs on the cheekbones, and short dotted lines known as *mupila* marks extending from the corners of the eyes towards the ears. The headdress, of unusual type, is made of fabric stretched on bamboo stems, and fixed with leather or animal skin, string, fibers, and decorated with rows of old and precious beads. A close look at the back of the mask, inside the headdress, shows traces of xylophagous insects and a deep patina indicating the mask was stored in the village for a long period, and used intermittently during the initiations.

Biblio. : *Makishi Lya Zambia*, Marc Leo Felix & Manuel Jordan, 1998, p. 85-125, 130, 155.



This illustration of an Angolan Pwo performer was published by Portuguese explorer Henrique Carvalho (1890:245). The mask is similar to examples found among Lwena and Luchazi in Angola south and east of the town of Moxico in Angola and in areas of western and northwestern Zambia.





MELANESIA

20 A SUPERB BARAK MASK

Tarawai Island, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, 19th century
Wood, pigments, bindings
Height : 54,4 cm

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Provenance | Arthur Speyer, Eltville Ludwig Breitschneider, Munich John A. Friede, Rye |
| Publication | <i>New Guinea Art : Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection</i> , John Friede (coll.), Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 2005, illustrated vol. I p. 55 |

In the catalogue of objects from the Jolika collection, John Friede notes about this mask : “the male barak spirit is customarily portrayed on the west coast of the Sepik with a long pointed nose. The image has many variations and this old mask represents an island version. The Goldwater library photo files at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, include a very similar mask (NG-13, Tumleo J-2)”, collected on Tumleo Island, and now in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Frankfurt.

Actually, it seems that the insular version of the *barak* mask, scarce and older, is clearly of a distinct type. Unlike the inland *barak* masks, which have a sharp pointed “mosquito” nose, the masks collected on the small islands off the coast, in the Sandaun and East Sepik provinces, have a beaked bird-like nose, pierced with small holes for ornamentation. The Islands’ masks are also larger, roughly 55 cm, and they all have comparable decorative motifs painted with red and white pigments (on the present mask, small dots of Reckitt’s blue are also visible over the whole face). These characteristics are illustrated with another important *barak* mask collected on Seleo Island and acquired by Roland Bonaparte in 1876 ; illustrated in Stephen Chauvet’ “*Les Arts indigènes en Nouvelle-Guinée*” under the number 399 (see above), it is now on view in the Musée du Quai Branly.



Biblio. : *Les Arts indigènes en Nouvelle-Guinée*, S. Chauvet, 1930, pl. 106 and p. 348
New Guinea Art : Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection, John Friede (collectif), 2005, vol. II p. 87, n° 29



21 A SUPERB TERRACOTTA MASK

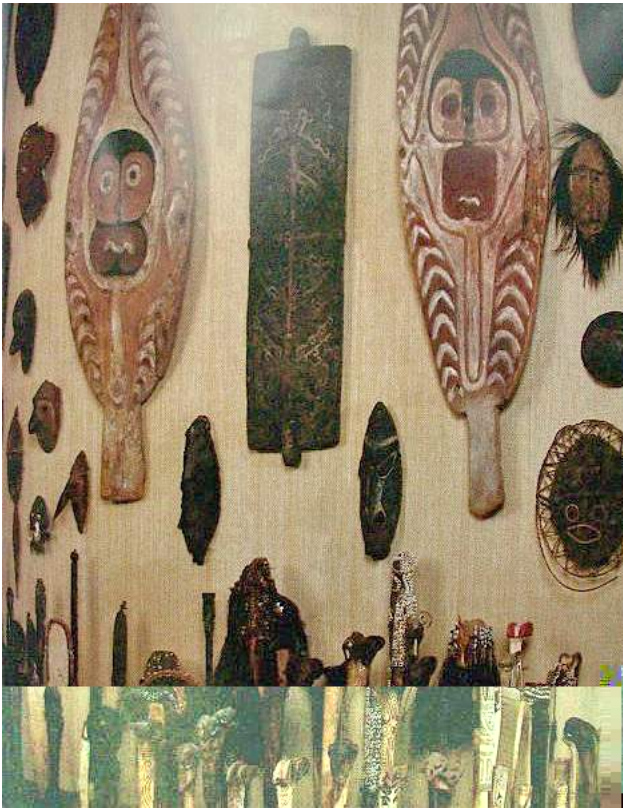
Ramu/Lower Sepik River, Papua New Guinea, 19th century
Terracotta, pigments
Height : 16 cm

Provenance John A. Friede, Rye

This rare terracotta mask is indeed one of the largest and finest example of clay mask we know. Like their wooden counterparts, it has a typical long beaked nose pierced on each side of the nostrils to receive various ornaments, and a few holes on the edges for attachment on the sacred flutes. The surface has a bicolor, red and dark, aspect resulting from the firing of the clay; and it still retains some original ochre and lime pigments.

The incorporation of zoomorphic elements on human figures is characteristic of the art of the Sepik cultures, and represents the strong relationship between the ancestors and the animal spirits.

This mask appears on a photography taken from John Friede’s collection circa 2010, on the far left of the picture, hanging on the wall along other small wooden masks used for decoration of the sacred flutes.



22 A SUPERB LOWER SEPIK MASK

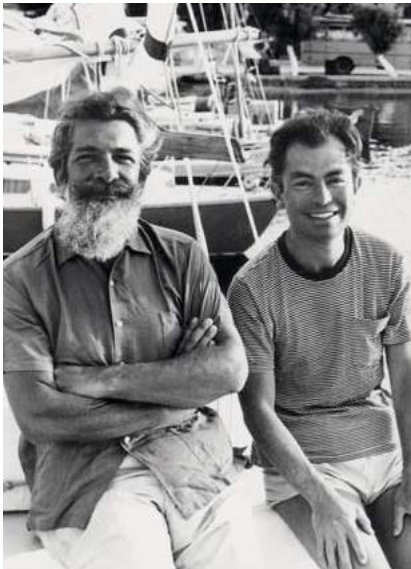
Watam, Lower Sepik, Papua New Guinea, 19th century
Wood, pigments
Height : 42,5 cm

Provenance Serge Brignoni, Berne
Peter Kohler, Ascona (n° PK102)
John Hewett, London, 1970
Private collection, New York

Exhibition *Kunst uit Nieuw Guinea*, Verzameling Peter Kohler, Ascona
Museum Fofor, Amsterdam, 22 may-30 June 1963, n°102

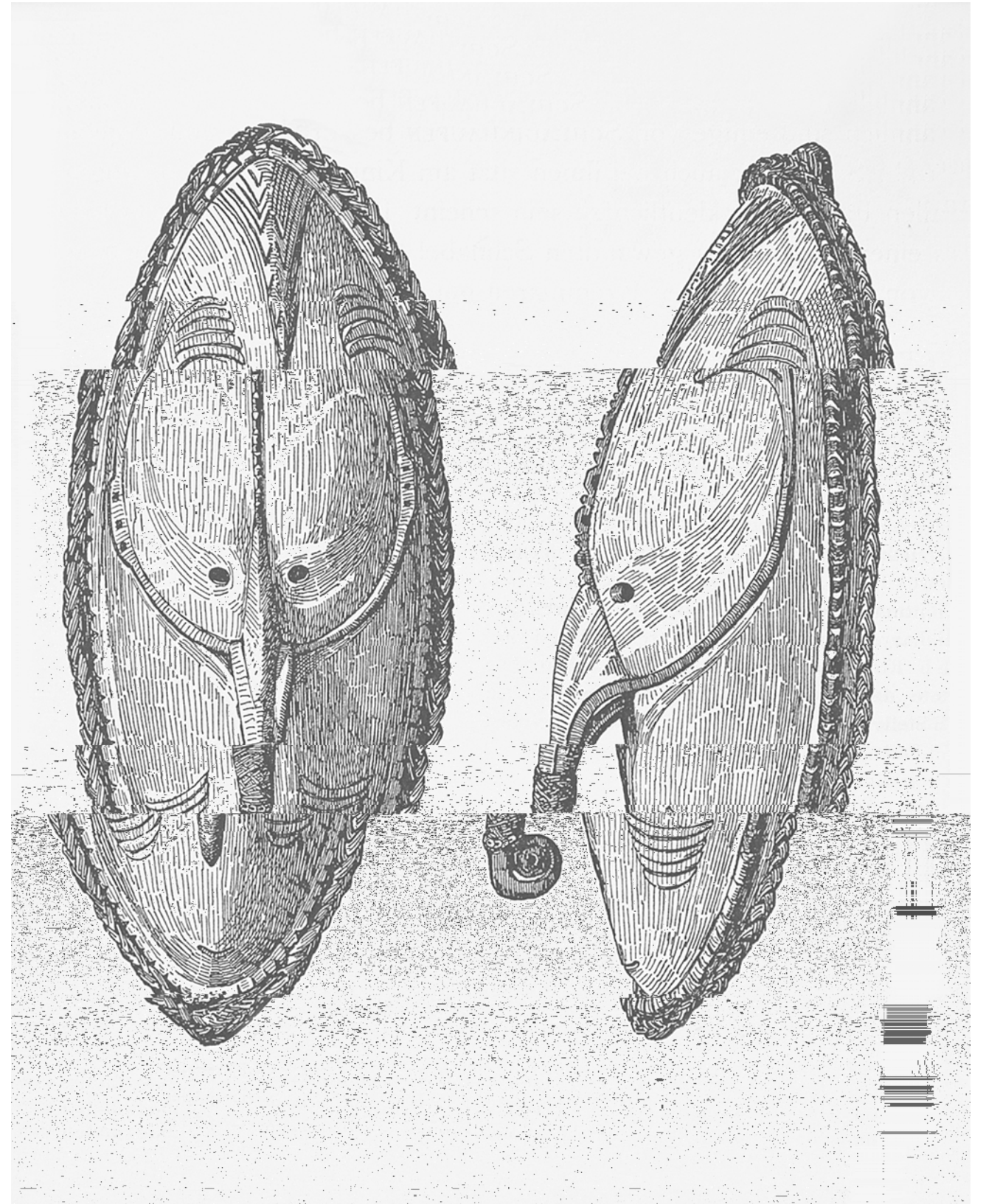
This extremely old mask originates from the coastal region along the Watam lagoon, between the mouth of the Sepik and the Ramu River. The main characteristic of this corpus of masks is the long looped nose terminating in spiral, and resembling a lizard's tail. The surface also is decorated with red-painted spirals and curved lines emulating the whirls of the water. The cheeks and brows are accented with deeply carved grooves. Despite the losses to the edges, the effects of wear have enhanced the beauty and mystery which emanate from this haunting mask. Leading collectors made no mistake, and the mask was successively part of the collection of Swiss painter Serge Brignoni, then Peter Kohler, and eventually of one of the most influential personality in the ethnographic and antiquities market of the 1950s -1980s, the London dealer John Hewett.

Biblio. : *Kunst vom Sepik*, Heinz Kelm (1968), vol. III, n°154.
Kunst uit Nieuw Guinea, Museum Fofor, Amsterdam (1963), n°102.



John Hewett and collector George Ortiz, 1969





A mask from the coastal village of Kopar, Lower Sepik

In *Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss*, Otto Reche, 1913, p. 406, Abb. 424

23 A SUPERB AND RARE BOGIA MASK

Bogia region, Madang Province, Papua New Guinea, 19th century
Wood, pigments
Height : 52 cm

Provenance Private collection, Australia

This mask is the best example of a tight corpus of old masks from the remote region of Bogia, located between the right bank of the lower Ramu and the mountainous chain known as Adelbert Range. Carved with genius, it has an absolutely striking expression, hilarious, joyful, and disturbing at the same time. The face is enhanced by a superb polychromy, unique to our knowledge, of white dots over Reckitt’s blue background surrounding the eyes. The importation and use of European bluing laundry pigments in Melanesia is attested from the late nineteenth century, and it remained widespread in the regions administered by the British and German colonial empires till the first decades of the twentieth century.

The art of Bogia region is rare in public collections, nevertheless, a mask of the same type yet smaller can be seen in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (1975.305)



24 AN EARLY SEPIK MASK

Yuat River or Lower Sepik, Papua New Guinea, 19th century
Wood, pigments
Height : 27,5 cm

Provenance Ralf Lüders, Stuttgart
 Ulrich Kortmann, Dortmund

The archaic, rough appearance, and the uneven surface of this very old mask are characteristic of stone-carved sculptures which are pre-contact. Despite the small accidents and the effects of wear and insects, the mask has kept an attractive blackish patina with traces of lime, and a haunting expression. The numbers written on the back of the mask, *PK288*, could match with German museums labels such as the Museum für Völkerkunde of Berlin, or with those of Swiss collector Peter Kohler, a very active buyer of Sepik sculptures in the mid-twentieth century (see page 62).



25 AN EARLY GABLE MASK

Iatmul, Papua New Guinea, 1900-1950
Rattan, wood, bamboo, fiber, pigments
Height : 111 cm

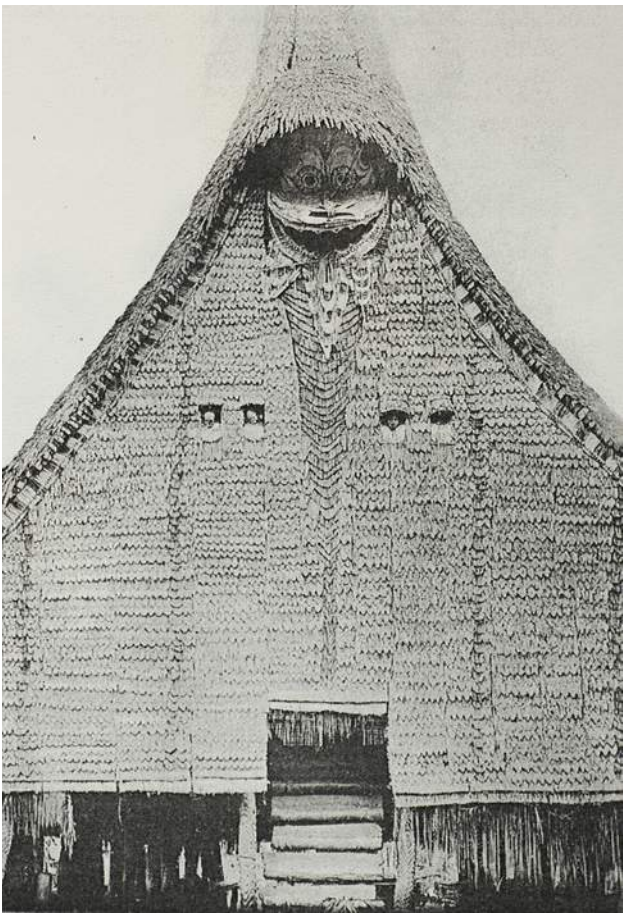
Provenance Loed Van Bussel, Amsterdam

This basketry mask made of cane and painted with ochre, white and black pigments, with carved wooden nose ornaments and eyes, was placed on the gable of the ceremonial house by the people living in the middle Sepik area. Sometimes it was woven as part of the structure. Bateson (1932: 259) says they are the female personification of the house.

As highly decorative tribal art objects, emblematic of Sepik cultures, a large number of these gable masks were made during the course of the twentieth century, some of them for the trade. Undoubtedly, this fine and early example was once adorning the front of a *haus Tambaran*.

Similar masks can be seen in German and American museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1979.206.1687).

Gable of the ceremonial house at km293, Sepik River.
Photo by F. Fülleborn, 30 May 1909, in *Reche, Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss*, Tafel XXIX, s. 135

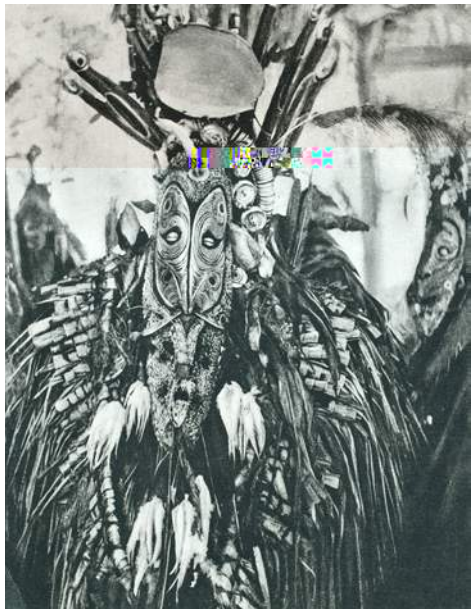


26 A MAGNIFICENT MWAI MASK

| | |
|--|--|
| Iatmul, Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea, 19th century Wood, pigments, rattan Height : 51 cm | |
| Provenance | Collected by Prof. Ferdinand Hefele in 1909 Linden Museum, Stuttgart Ernest Heinrich collection, Bad-Cannstadt Loed Van Bussel, Amsterdam John A. Friede, Rye Private collection, Paris |
| Publication | <i>Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss</i> , Otto Reche, 1913, Plate LXXVIII n° 1. |

The general name of this mask derives from the cauri shells (*mwai*). However, it appears that early examples, such as the present one, were decorated more soberly, without the shell ornaments but beautifully painted with curvilinear designs imitating the whirls of the water in the River (each clan having its own motifs). The use of shells became widespread later on with the trade with the coastal region.

The *mwai* represents the spirit of a mythological clan ancestor, incarnated not only by the mask, but by the whole ceremonial costume worn by the young dancers. Characteristically, they occurred in pairs embodying mythical brothers and sisters : always the elder and the younger. Each pair belonged to a specific clan elder (Kocher Schmid, 1985: 183). In preparation for wearing them, the masks were attached to conical basketry frameworks, decorated with leaves and flowers. After the masks have been prepared, pairs of masqueraders left the fenced-off part around a ceremonial house, crossing a bridge which went through and above the fence. While parading along the main alley of dancing ground in front of the ceremonial house they were surrounded by dancing women and children. The *mwai* was also used inside the ceremonial house during sessions aimed at consulting the spirits. It was held in a horizontal position over a fireplace by two men until it started to sway as a sign the spirit had entered it (Friede, 1985: 109).



“Costume et masque d’initiation”, Tambanum, 1935
Illustration from an article of Charles Van Den Broek in
French journal *Diversions*, Laboratoires Longuet, n° 41

Biblio.: *Art of the Sepik River*, C. Kocher Schmid, 1985, p. 183
New Guinea Art: Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection,
John A. Friede (collectif), 2005, vol. 2 p. 109, n° 167



27 A RARE SAWOS HELMET-MASK

Torembi, Sawos people, Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea, 15th-17th century
Wood, rattan, natural fiber, pigments, human hair, feathers (cassowary)
Height : 42 cm

Provenance Collected by Wayne Heathcote in Torembi, ca. 1960
John A. Friede collection, Rye

Publication *New Guinea Art : Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection*, John Friede (coll.),
Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 2005, vol. I, p. 273
Golgotha, The cult of skulls, Martin Doustar, 2014, p. 64

This mask and the the following one, a unique pair of Sawos dance helmets, were collected along a female reliquary in the village of Nyindengambit, in the vicinity of Torembi. They were a highly venerated group of objects in possession of the Wanike (Nyamei) clan. At the time of collection, the masks and the figure were still hanging inside the sacred house of Luluai family.



Inside the sacred house of Nyindengambit, Torembi, 1958-1959
Photo by Anthony Forge © The Forge collection, sheet 112 -1



28 A RARE SAWOS HELMET-MASK

Torembe village, Sawos people, Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea, 15th-17th century
Wood, rattan, natural fiber, pigments, human hair, feathers (cassowary)
Height : 32 cm

Provenance Collected by Wayne Heathcote in Torembe, ca. 1960
John A. Friede collection, Rye

Publication *New Guinea Art : Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection*, John Friede (coll.),
Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 2005, vol. I, p. 272
Golgotha, The cult of skulls, Martin Doustar, 2014, p. 65

The flat oval-shaped face, defined by symmetrical features on either side of a long thin nose and the dark color palette, are typical of the art of the Sawos. These characteristics are notably visible on early *Malu* boards. The Sawos culture is extremely ancient, it is believed to have preceded the Iatmul in the Middle Sepik Region, and both are closely related.

A thermoluminescence test performed on this mask at the University of Arizona has indicated a dating between 1480 and 1660, conclusive at 95,4 %.

Biblio. : *New Guinea Art : Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection*, John Friede (collectif), 2005, p. 272



29 A RARE SAWOS DANCE MASK

Sawos, Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea, circa 1900
Light wood (*Alstonia*), pigments
Height : 32,5 cm

Provenance Serge Brignoni, Berne
Loed Van Bussel, Amsterdam
Water Randel, New York
John A. Friede, Rye

Light wood of rounded shape carved in high relief, decorated with feathers and painted invariably with ochre, white and black pigments, this rare type of dance mask was worn by the Iatmul and the Sawos as a head ornament, tied by means of rattan shaft to a comb to fix the ornament to the hair. During ceremonial dances, they were whirled rapidly in the air to enhance dramatically the choregraphy.

The present mask followed the same trajectory, through prestigious Oceanic art collectors, as a very similar mask possibly carved by the same hand, which sold at Sotheby's Paris on December 5th 2007. The latter, somehow more spectacular with fresh pigments and larger size was probably made as a replacement for the present mask, which clearly appears to be older and of better carving.

For a comparable mask, see *Kunst vom Sepik* volume I, n° 73; and the Jolika collection n° 229 for a smaller dance mask (see below).

Biblio. : *New Guinea Art : Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection*, John JoFriede (collectif), 2005, vol. I, p. 256
Kunst vom Sepik, HeinzJo Keller (1966), Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin, vol. I, n° 73
Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, Sotheby's Paris, 5 Dec. 2007, lot 148



30 A RARE TERRACOTTA MASK

Yuat River, Papua New Guinea, 19th century
Clay
Height : 9 cm

Provenance Private collection, Paris

Some comparable small terracotta heads have been found in various places in the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea, such as the site of an abandoned spirit house in Panitem village in the Pora Pora area, or in the inland region comprised between the Yuat and the Karawari rivers, south of the Sepik. They were generally found by the villagers or during ground works, but local elders were often unable to tell what their function was. We believe they were attached to larger potteries, or possibly used in cults related to the yam.
Thermoluminescence (sometimes inconclusive due to the incomplete firing of the clay) has indicated a dating comprised between the 17th and the late 19th century on comparable terracottas from the Jolika collection of John and Marcia Friede.

Biblio. : *New Guinea Art : Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection*, John Friede (collectif), 2005, p. 285



31 A TERRACOTTA HEAD

Yuat region, East Sepik province, Papua New Guinea, 19th century
Clay
Height : 9 cm

Provenance Renaud Vanuxem, Paris
 Ulrich Kortmann, Dortmund



32 A TERRACOTTA MASKETTE

Yuat River, Papua New Guinea, 19th century
Clay
Height : 7,5 cm

Provenance Didier Zanette, Paris



33 A SUPERB *YINA* SPIRIT FIGURE

Kwoma people, Namau Ablatar, Upper Sepik River, Papua New Guinea, circa 1900
Wood, pigments, feathers
Height : 124,5 cm

- Provenance

Bruce Seaman, Tahiti
Wayne Heathcote, New York
The Masco Collection, Detroit
Sotheby's New York, 15 Nov. 2002, lot 165
Ed and Mina Smith, San Diego
- Exhibition

Oceanic Art : A Celebration of Form, San Diego Museum of Art,
San Diego, January 2009 - January 2010, fig. 1 (illustrated)

This concave oval mask-like sculpture is a *Yina* ancestral figure that was used during the Yina-Ma ceremonies practiced in the Ambunti Mountains region for the celebration of the yam harvest. It has superb proportions, with a long projecting nose, hollowed eyes, and an overhanging brow with grooved zigzag decoration. The whole figure is painted with a beautiful palette of black, red, yellow, white, and green mineral pigments, with remains of feather decoration on the edges of the face.

A very similar figure, also of great age and quality, is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, on view in gallery 354.

Biblio. : *Crocodile and cassowary*, Douglas Newton (1971), p. 84-85



34 A TALIPUN PLAITED HEAD

Yangoru Boiken area, East Sepik province, Papua New Guinea, 1900-1950
Basketry made from the stem of *lygodium*, pigments
Height : 25,5 cm

Provenance Private Belgian collection, acquired in Papua New Guinea circa 1960

In his essay titled *Talipuns* - A unique Boiken Artifact, Ron May explains that “the *talipun* is an artifact unique to the Yangoru Boiken and Kubalia Boiken (Saussia) people of East Sepik Province. It is an important item of ceremonial exchange, particularly in bride-price payments. An image of a *talipun* is included on the design of Papua New Guinea’s 5 kina banknote.
The talipun consists of a section of the giant green snail, or turban shell (*Turbo marmoratus*), onto which is attached a decoration, usually in the form of a face finely plaited or coiled from cane which is obtained from rainforest vines.” (Hamson, 2011 : 133)

This haunting head is a superb example of *talipun*, much older than most objects of this type, it is tightly woven and skilfully shaped, with nice remnants of natural pigments surrounding the eyes, and a powerful expression.

Biblio. : *Art of the Boiken*, Michael Hamson, 2011, p. 133-163



35 A RARE TERRACOTTA MASK

Yuat River, Papua New Guinea, 1840-1890
Clay
Height : 15 cm

Provenance Private collection, Paris

This large terracotta mask was collected in the inland region located near the junction of the Yuat River with the Sepik. Although slightly damaged in the lower part it has kept a haunting and powerful expression, reminiscent of some wooden masks from the same region.

A thermoluminescence test has determined a date comprised between 1840 and 1890.



36 AN IMPORTANT ASTROLABE BAY MASK

Astrolabe Bay, Madang province, Papua New Guinea. 18th-19th century
Wood, black and red pigments, traces of lime
Height : 32 cm, width : 18cm, depth : 23 cm

Provenance Jacques Alderink, Amsterdam, circa 1930
Lore Kegel, Hamburg (acquired from above in 1940)
Boris Kegel-Konietzko, Hamburg
Loed Van Bussel, Amsterdam

This extremely old and powerful mask is a rare testimony of the vanished art of Astrolabe Bay; it is also one of the most archaic expressions of the art of Papua New Guinea.
Probably collected in the village of Bogadjim by one of the early German travelers such as Hugo Zöller, Albert Hoffmann or Bernard Hagen in the last decade of the 19th century, the mask shows strong similarities with the facial features of the ancestral *telum* figures (see below). The corpus of dance masks, often fragmented or roughly carved, is extremely limited, with only a few examples in public collections. The present mask, with its bold hatchet-faced features, complex architecture, and thick encrusted surface in overall superb condition is certainly among the most beautiful and important ever collected.



Labels on back of the mask



Ancestral figure (telum) from Bongu, 1877



Masked Papuan from Bongu, 1870-71
Drawings by N. Mikluho-Maclay



In his notes on the ethnography of New Guinea, Hungarian ethnographer Tibor Bodrogi writes : “Although Astrolabe Bay was one of the earliest territories of Papua New Guinea to be visited we possess comparatively little knowledge of the cultures of the various groups of peoples inhabiting it. In addition, the greater part of the scanty information available dates back to the end of the last century (...) This is all the more to be regretted as even from the meager information at hand it definitely transpires that this territory is one of the most archaic parts of New Guinea. (...) The coastline is one of those regions where German colonization began as early as 1884, and the contact with the West soon made the greater part of the items of this old culture disappear.” (1961: 91)

The first European to land in Astrolabe Bay was the famous Russian ethnographer Mikluho-Maclay in 1873; the material he collected is now in the Museum of Ethnography of St Petersburg. The other significant group of objects was collected by Samuel Fenichel between 1891-1893, it is now housed in the Hungarian National Museum of Budapest. Apart from these two collections no other museum possesses sufficient material to give a picture of a wider cultural range on a more comprehensive scale.

The initiation rites of young men and their circumcision are the most important events in the life of the people of Astrolabe Bay. These rituals are associated with a secret spirit-cult known as *Ai* in Bongu village and *Asa* in Bogadjim. Women, children and uninitiated boys are excluded from these festivities. The central figure of this cult is a mythological oger (*Ai/Asa*) who used to destroy the fields and devour the children. The *Ai-gaté* or *Asa-katé* (translates as *Asa-head*) are the masks which personify his spirit. These dance masks were the most important items of the initiation and the cult.

Biblio. : *Sobranie Sochinenii* (collected works), Mikluho-Maclay, Moscow, 1950-1954, volume III p. 101, 117

Some notes on the ethnography of New Guinea, T. Bodrogi, 1953, p. 91-184

New Guinea Art: Masterpieces from the Jolika collection, J. Friede, 2005, n° 366

Below: two masks collected by Lajos Biro and Samuel Fenichel, circa 1890.



N°8920, H. 45 cm



N°8923, H. 57 cm



37 A SUPERB BARKCLOTH MASK, *KANIPU*

Namau people, Purari Delta, Gulf of Papua, Papua New Guinea, 19th century
Bark cloth, cane, wood, cord, pigments, various labels
Height : 41 cm

Provenance Museum Umlauff, Hamburg (n° 2903)
Alain de Monbrison, Paris
John A. Friede, Rye

In the Papuan Gulf, “masking was the central focus of community rituals. When men put on masks for a performance, people in the gulf traditionally expected that something transcendental would occur. Through some sort of spirit possession the dancer took on the identity of a spirit, even becoming this spirit temporarily.” (Welsch, 2007: 11)
The present mask is constructed of painted bark cloth stretched over and wrapped around the side of a wooden stick and rattan armature, which is lashed together with cord and split cane. The shape of the mask is flat and oval, with a protruding mouth. A further stylized face has been created with the application of bold abstract forms in black paint against a white background. The highly graphical aspect of the face, its perfect clarity and remarkable condition make this mask a wonderful testimony of the ancient art and culture of the Papuan Gulf, and a timeless creation of absolute modernity.

Biblio.: *Coaxing the Spirits to Dance*, Robert L. Welsch, Virginia-Lee Webb, Sebastian Haraha, 2007, Hood Museum of Art, p. 11



Kanipu mask, Purari Delta, probably Maipua area
Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum, New York



Two Papuan Gulf men dressed in full body masks
British New Guinea, real photo postcard, ca. 1910



38 A RARE PHOTO OF TORRES STRAIT MASKS

THOMSON, Stephen, edited by W. A. MANSELL & co., circa 1865-1870
Albumen print from a wet collodion glass plate negative
Size : 20,3 x 26,3 cm

Provenance Pierre Marc Richard, Paris

The creation of Torres Strait masks or effigies made from turtle shell was a centuries-old tradition that was first witnessed by Westerners in 1606 and continued until the end of the 19th century. The forms, materials, and imagery of these masks varied from region to region. In the eastern Torres Strait, turtle-shell masks, known as *le op* (human face), almost universally took the form of human images adorned with lifelike coiffures and beards of human hair. Equipped with an opening on the underside, which allowed it to be slipped over the head, the mask completely covered the performer's head and face when worn. *Le op* masks appear to have been used in initiations and, possibly, in other rites. However, they were primarily employed in funerary ceremonies held to honor and appease the spirits of the deceased, enabling them to travel to the island of the dead, which lay in the direction of the setting sun.

This early photograph of a pair of extremely rare turtle shell masks from Darnley Island, in the eastern part of the Torres strait, was taken by Stephen Thompson (1831-1892), traveler, author, art critic and renowned London photographer, notably for the British Museum and the royal family. These two masks were initially in the collection of Sir Henry Christy, a Quaker businessman whose wealth helped him to travel the world in search of ethnographical and archeological specimens. His interest in ethnology developed through Quaker concerns about the abolition of slavery and the protection of aboriginal peoples in British colonies. In 1865, he was elected to the Royal Society but did not live to take his place there. The bulk of his large collection was offered to the British Museum by the trustees of his estate and was accepted circa 1868. This image was probably taken around this time.



Aboriginal with devil's mask, Charles Kerry, 1890's
Postcard published by Kerry & co. circa 1905



39 AN IMPORTANT MALANGGAN MASK

Northern New Ireland, Bismarck Archipelago, 19th century
Wood, bees-wax, bark hair, pigments, fiber, cane, Turbo operculum, shell
Height : 29 cm

Provenance Collected in German New Guinea before 1914
Private European collection

This rare and magnificent mask is one of the very best examples inside a tight corpus of highly desired masks of New Ireland. In his 1907 masterwork *Dreißig Jahre in der Südsee*, *Thirty years in the South Seas*, Richard Parkinson has noted that on the Mainland of Northern New Ireland there was two types of masks named *kepong*, one of which featuring an overmodelled and very realistic looking face. Michael Gunn further writes that on Tabar Island this type of face is known as *Nicmaget*, where it is a major mask said by its owners to be the boss of all other masks. The name *Nicmaget* means “black lips” or “black tooth marks”. (1997 : 144)
It appears that most of these rare masks have been collected in the 19th century, or around 1900, and are now located in German museums, like the *kepong* mask collected by the S.M.S Gazelle in July-August 1875 now in the Museum für Völkerkunde of Berlin (fig. 1), or the one in Dresden, acquired from J. F. G. Umlauff in 1887.

Biblio. : *Thirty years in the South Seas*, R. Parkinson, 1907.
Ritual Arts of Oceania : New Ireland in the collections of the Barbier-Mueller, Michael Gunn, 1997, p. 140-141, 144.
Nouvelle-Irlande, Arts du Pacifique Sud, M. Gunn & P. Peltier, 2007, plate 131.



Fig. 1





ASIA

40 AN IMPORTANT STUCCO FRAGMENT

Taxila, Gandhara region, Pakistan, 300-500 AD
Stucco
Height : 27 cm

Provenance : Private collection, Paris

Not quite a mask but a slightly larger than life-size stucco head, this sensitive rendition of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni displays powerful patrician features, with heavily lidded almond-shaped eyes under high arching brows, and full lips. His heart-shaped face framed by elongated, pierced ears, and wavy hair pulled back. The use of stucco, the treatment of the hair and the distinct facial features all indicate a Taxila origin.



41 A JAVANESE MASK, WAYANG TOPENG

Island of Java, Indonesia, 19th century or before
Wood, pigment
Height : 16,7 cm

Provenance : Bruno Gay collection, Paris

The Javanese word *wayang* literally means “shadow”, it refers to a traditional form of puppet theatre in Indonesia. This ancient form of storytelling originated on the Indonesian island of Java. The first record of a *wayang* performance is from an inscription dated 930 CE, but the tradition is probably older and predates hindu-buddhist influences. For ten centuries *wayang* flourished at the royal courts of Java and Bali as well as in rural areas. It later spreads to the other islands of the peninsula.

The *wayang topeng* (*topeng* is the Indonesian word for “mask”) is the theatrical performance in which one or more, mask-wearing, ornately-costumed performers, interpret traditional narratives depicting fabled kings, heroes and myths, usually accompanied by the *gamelan*, the traditional ensemble music in Java and Bali, made up predominantly of percussive instruments.

The most popular storyline of *topeng* dance derives from the locally-developed Javanese Panji cycles, that based upon the tales and romance of Prince Panji and Princess Chandra Kirana, settled in twelfth-century Kadiri kingdom. Chandra Kirana was the incarnation of Dewi Ratih (goddess of love) and Panji was an incarnation of Kamajaya (god of love). It is believed that the use of masks is related to the cult of the ancestors, which considered dancers the interpreters of the gods.

The present mask, of archaic style with a noble expression reminiscent of the Kouros of ancient Greece, is an extremely fine and ancient example, attested by the crusty patina covering the whole surface. These old masks were venerated as sacred heirlooms believed to possess magical powers.

Biblio. : *Java-Masken, Der Tanz auf einem Bein*. Heinz Lucas, 1973



Javanese dancers, circa 1870
Photography by Kassian Céphas



42 A SUPERB *HUDOQ* MASK

Bahau Dayak, East Kalimantan, Borneo, Indonesia, circa 1900
Wood, pigments, cane, feathers
Height : 42 cm without feathers

Provenance Private collection, Bali
Acher Eskenasy, Paris

Among the various Dayak peoples of the Upper Mahakam River area, dance festivals were held shortly after sowing to ensure the proper growth of young rice plants. The young mask-wearers entered the village by the river or the forest dressed in large mantles of banana leaves hand-made in the forest in the utmost secrecy. The masks are thus brought out to symbolise the passage from nature to cultivation serving both as scarecrows to ward off evil spirits and as incarnation of spirits who had come down to earth to bless and protect the harvest.

The *hudoq* mask combines the sparkling polychromy of delicate arabesques with extremely stylised forms and exaggerated features. Composed of mixed elements that borrow from zoomorphic and anthropomorphic repertoires to emphasize its ferociousness, *hudoq*'s purpose is to frighten and reassure, inspiring a mixture of respect, pleasure, and fear.

The most prestigious type of *hudoq* is the composite dragon-hornbill mask, such as the present example. This very old mask is characterized by superb proportions and refined polychromy made from natural pigments. It retains its woven rattan hat decorated with feathers of the great argus pheasant.

Biblio.: *Art of Island Southeast Asia, The Fred and Rita Richman collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Florina Capistrano-Baker, 1994, p. 33

Mask dance during the sowing celebration of the Bahau Dayak, Upper Mahakam, 1898-1900.

This picture was taken by Jean Demmeni during the AW Nieuwenhuis Commission's Journey to Central Borneo. Courtesy of the National Museum of World Cultures, Amsterdam. Coll.nr. TM-60001698.



43 AN EARLY *YALI* BRONZE MASK

Kerala, Southern India, 1600-1700
Bronze
Height : 15 cm

Provenance Private collection, Bruxelles (acquired in India ca. 1980)

Yali is a mythological creature of the Hindu pantheon, and a common figural motif of temple architecture in Southern India. The term derives from the sanskrit word *vyala* which translates as fierce monster. In Hindu legend, Yali is depicted with the body of a lion, the tail of a peacock, and the trunk and tusks of an elephant. It has also been described as a leogryph (part lion, part griffin), with some bird-like features. There are actually many variations in the appearance given to Yali and as many interpretations of the same creature accross cultures. It may be related to the mask of Medusa as it was used in Greek and Roman architecture, or to the Gorgon heads with their terrific faces carved on gates and walls of forts, palaces, and temples to ward off enemies and other dangers, etc.



44 A NAGA SANNI YAKKA MASK

Sri Lanka, 19th century
Wood, pigments, lacquer, fiber
Height : 27 cm without the beard

Provenance Jacques Lebrat, Paris

The cosmology of traditional Sri Lankan beliefs is a complex mixture of native Vedic gods, spirits, and demons, overlaid with imported Hindu and Buddhist deities, beliefs, and practices. This pantheon is vast, filled with hierarchies and sub-hierarchies which the uninitiated finds nearly impossible to grasp. The synthesis is a spiritual landscape where Buddha reigns supreme, but where the day-to-day is fraught with danger from the *yakku* (devils) and other malignant forces (*vas*) which seem all too ready to afflict man with scourges of every description. In this world, life is a constant struggle against these forces.

Central to this struggle are the *natima* masked dance ceremonies to cure diseases, help failing crops, prevent drought, and provide protection for troubled pregnancies. A cast of specific characters and dramas have developed over the centuries to counteract almost every affliction and ailment. The *yakun natima*, and the *kolam natima* (masquerade dance) represent two of the historically prominent forms these dance rituals have taken. Masks used in these rituals provide wonderful insight into the belief systems and practices which form the core of traditional Sinhalese beliefs regarding health.

In his seminal work *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon* (1954), Paul Wirz lists eighteen demons and their effects. The masks used in the various rituals are carved to represent these demons (Alan Pate, 1998). Among them, *Naga-sanniya* is the demon which causes evil dreams, particularly with snakes. *Naga* being the Sanskrit word to designate the king cobra, and snakes in general.

The present mask, an early example with striking expression, is the incarnation of this demon.

Biblio. : *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon*, Paul Wirz, 1954.
Masks and exorcism of Sri Lanka, Alain Loviconi, 1986.
Devil dances mask of Sri Lanka, Alan Pate, Arts of Asia Sept./Oct. 1998



45 A SINHALESE DEMON MASK

Sri Lanka, 19th century
Wood, pigments
Height : 18,5 cm

Provenance Private collection, Paris

Sri Lanka has a 2500-years-old mask tradition of theatre and exorcism, the most important in the whole Asia. Diseases have traditionally been thought to be sometimes caused by *yakkas* and other evil forces. When it is believed, for example, that a lingering sickness is caused by such forces, the patient's family used to turn – and still does to a limited extent – to an *edura*, or exorcist, to perform a *tovil*, or devil dance, characterised by the wearing of *yak vesmuhunu*, devil masks. This healing ceremony goes back to the most ancient times, and is supposed to treat the cause of the disease, not the symptom. These demons represent the disease syndromes, and their masks show clinical features of these syndromes. *Gedi Sanniya*, demon of boils and skin diseases has facial lesions resembling carbuncles. The present mask is a representation of this demon; it has a gruesome aspect and shows some ritual mutilation on the forehead, resulting from healing ceremonies.



Gabriele Muntz, *Black mask with rose*, 1912
Courtesy of Hutton Galleries, New York



46 TERRACOTTA MASK OF A DEITY

Eastern Tibet, 19th century
Clay, pigments, cloth, gild
Height : 13 cm

Provenance Collected by André Migot in Eastern Tibet, ca. 1946-1949

In *Tibetan Civilization*, R.A. Stein defines the role of masks in Buddhism as a didactic one. Even though the ritual shall manifest the presence of deities through meditation, they remain invisible for laypeople. Masks are supposed to facilitate the manifestation of a deity. Their didactic role is notably displayed in masked dances (Cham).
This rare and old terracotta mask is the embodiment of the Wrathful Deity. It shows a typical demon face painted with natural pigments and gilt. A piece of cloth attached with string to the mask indicates that it was probably mounted on the face of a Dharmapâla figure, as seen in many Tibetan monasteries.

Biblio.: *Tibetan Civilization*, R. A. Stein, 1972
For two similar pieces, refer to N. Bazin, *Rituels Tibétains - Visions secrètes du V° Dalai-Lama*, at the Musée Guimet, Paris, 5 Nov. 2002-24 Feb. 2003, n° 171 et 172, illustrated in the catalogue p. 190-191.





PRECOLUMBIAN

47 A TEOTIHUACAN STONE MASK

Teotihuacan, Classical period, Mexico, 450-650 AD
Alabaster
Height : 15 cm

Provenance Private collection, USA

Teotihuacan was a Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican city located in a sub valley of the Valley of Mexico, located in the State of Mexico 30 miles (48 km) northeast of modern-day Mexico City. It is known today as the site of many of the most architecturally significant Mesoamerican pyramids built in the Pre-Columbian Americas. The city is thought to have been established around 100 BC, with major monuments continuously under construction until about 250 AD. The city may have lasted until some time between the 7th and 8th centuries AD, but its major monuments were sacked and systematically burned around 550 AD. The term Teotihuacan is also used for the whole civilization and cultural complex associated with the site.

The masks that have been excavated at Teotihuacan were mostly found in ritual deposits in corridors and administrative structures along the sacred avenues, such as the famous Avenue of the Dead, supporting the theory that stone masks were ceremonial rather than funerary items.

This beautiful and classical example was carved with a great sense of balance and harmony. The details of the face, such as the eyes contour, the nasal bone, nostrils and wings, the lips and the philtrum, slightly hollowed, were rendered with sensibility and realism. The overall face is subtly modeled to follow the relief of the cranium and the curves of the flesh. Holes were drilled in the eyes, mouth and ears, with traces of old limestone found into them. The eyes and mouth were probably once inlaid with shell, obsidian and/or iron pyrites. Earspools, made of perishable material, may have been originally set in the pierced ears. The temples were pierced as well, but for attachment on a larger structure.



48-49 TWO RARE TEOTIHUACAN PENDANTS

Teotihuacan culture, Central Mexico, 250-650 AD
Amazonite
Height : 2,1 cm (46), 2 cm (47)

Provenance Private collection, Paris

These small maskettes, identical replicas of the larger stone masks, were carved with extraordinary precision in a green mineral, most probably amazonite, a stone symbol of life eternally reborn. They were worn around the neck, as protective amulets. The present examples have a calcereous deposit on the surface ; the one below nearly entirely recovered by a thin layer of scale.
Similar examples carved in turquoise can be found in the Museo Nacional de Antropología of Mexico.



46



47

50 AN EARLY *TECALI* MASK

Teotihuacan, Late Preclassic/Protoclassic period, Mexico, ca. 200 BC-200 AD
Tecali
Height : 14,8 cm

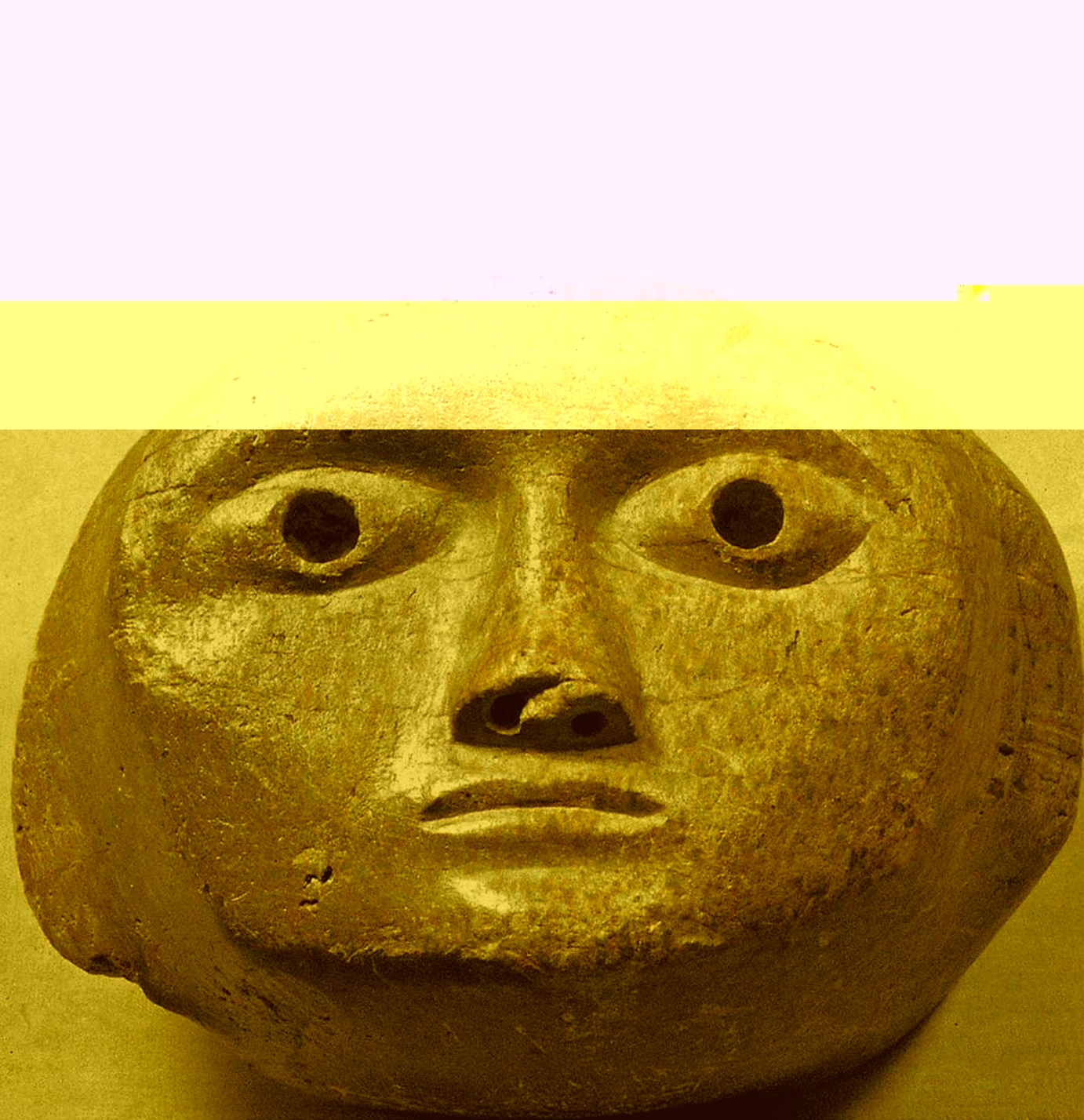
Provenance Galerie Becker, Cannes, prior to 1970
Private collection, Monaco

The idealized stone masks of Teotihuacan are the permanent features of grand ceremonial rituals involving dressed effigies of which the masks were the fixed element. *Tecali* masks were a smaller corpus, with the varying color, texture and translucency of the stone possibly selected for certain effigies or festivities reserved for an elite.

Tecali is a carbonate of lime, an aragonite with a hardness of 3.5 to 4.0 on the Moss scale. It is also known as banded onyx (note the layers of different shades of colour), Mexican onyx, and Tehuacan marble, and is quarried in the region of Tecali in southern Puebla. Carved *tecali* artefacts first appeared in Mesoamerica in the late Pre-Classic period (300–200 B.C.), objects of superior quality have been reported from Teotihuacan, dating as early as A.D. 150–250.

The present mask shows strong similarities with the Sultepec type, and it was probably influenced by this earlier regional style: a soft and delicately modeled face, with a thin pointed nose, large oval eyes and mouth, slightly hollowed and drilled to receive stone or shell ornaments. The whole face is traversed by a natural linear relief used by the carver to underline the eyes. Two holes pierced at the temples were used for attachment. The original patina, deep and contrasted, is superb.





Two Masks, Henry Moore, 1929
© The Henry Moore Foundation 2015. Photo Scala, Florence

51 A RARE MASK OF XIPE TOTEC

Late Antiquity, Mexico
Grey stone
Height : 18 cm

Provenance Byron W. Knoblock, Quincy, Illinois, acquired 15 June 1936
Milton K. Harrington, Belleville Illinois, acquired 4 Nov. 1985
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Foundation, acquired 23 August 1991
Private collection, Paris (deaccessioned from the above)

This rare mask is probably an early incarnation of Xipe Totec, “Our Lord the Flayed One” in Nahuatl, a major god in ancient Mesoamerican cultures and particularly important for the Toltecs and Aztecs. Of uncertain origin, Xipe Totec perhaps originated with the Olmec culture and developed from their ancient God VI, also described as the banded-eye god, for the narrow band that runs along the side of its face through its almond-shaped eye with its round iris. Another possible origin is from the Yope civilization in the southern highlands of Guerrero. The first representations of the god in art, however, date back to the Post-classical period (9th to 12th century CE) in the Mazapan culture at Texcoco. Xipe Totec is the god symbolizing the revival of nature, the god of seed time and harvest, the patron of goldsmiths and gemstone workers. Every spring, in the third month of the solar year, the festival of Tlacaxipehualiztli was held in honour of Xipe Totec and human sacrifices were made to appease the god and ensure a good harvest. The sacrificial victims, usually war captives, were then skinned in symbolic imitation of the regeneration of plants and seeds which shed their husks and thereby provided new seeds. The skins of all these victims were dyed yellow and called *teocuitlaquemitl*, or golden robes, and were either worn by priests who performed ritual dances in them in the ceremony known as *To-zoztontl* held the following month, or worn for 20 days by young men who then went around begging until the skins rotted away, and the remains were then buried in the god’s temple.

The present mask shows the face of the god covered with the skin of a victim; the sculptor has skilfully rendered the aspect of the double skin, streaming down and sealing the eyes. The surface of the mask has a beautiful nuanced patina, altered by natural elements and burying, with possible remnants of yellowish-grey pigments imitating the dyed color of the human skin covering. The ears and temples are pierced, respectively for ornamentation and attachment.



Xipe Totec as depicted in the *Codex Borgia*, wearing a flayed human skin, in Joseph Florimond , page 61 of *Codex Borgia*.



52 A RARE AND IMPORTANT FUNERARY MASK

Sicán, La Leche River, northwestern Peru, 750 - 1375 AD
Silver, pigment (cinnabar)
Width : 39 cm

Provenance Private American collection, acquired prior to 1970

The Sicán culture, also referred to as the Lambayeque culture after the name of the region where it was initially discovered, succeeded the Moche and preceded the Inca. The Sicán inhabited a coastal territory near the La Leche and Lambayeque Rivers.

The excavations and research of archeologists such as Izumi Shimada revealed that the cultural florescence of the Sicán occurred between 900-1100 AD. This period known as Middle Sicán is characterized by a highly productive economy, clear social differentiation, and an influential religious ideology. The religious ideology was the underpinning of the structure of their theocratic state.

The funerary practices of the Sicán suggest the existence of an elite lineage that used the new Sicán religion to demonstrate and maintain their power. This elite used funerary practices as a way to symbolize their relationship to the divine. Masks were part of the burial regalia of high-status women as well as men. According to myths on the north coast, gold was particularly associated with male rulers, silver with noble women, and copper with commoners. When they died, the lords were buried deep in monumental mud-brick platform mounds along with large numbers of objects of precious metal, shell, and cloth. As many as five masks were placed into one burial: one attached to the head of the textile-wrapped body, and the others stacked at the feet of the deceased. It appears that golden masks were much more common than those made of silver.

The present mask is an exceptional example of this latter type. Made of a hammered sheet of silver shaped into the form of a face, the mask is in a remarkable state of preservation, retaining all of its original ornaments and color. The face is painted with cinnabar, a red mineral pigment that emulates the patterning of face paint worn by individuals of importance. The eyes have thin, skewer-like projections emerging from the pupils, suggesting supernatural vision. And the ears are decorated with bird heads and figures in the shape of the mythological ruler *Naylamp*, the bird-man, whose legend tells he turned into a bird from his grave and flew away. Obviously, this metaphor of escape from death refers to the protective properties of the funerary masks.

The Brüning Museum in Lambayeque contains the collections of objects gathered by Enrique Brüning at the turn of the twentieth century; it includes several funerary masks, and in particular a very similar silver mask from Chornancap found in the tomb of an importance priestess.



53 AN IMPORTANT CHANCAY WOODEN MASK

Chancay culture, Peru, 1300-1500 AD
Wood, textile, string, feathers, shell, pigments, resin
Height : 41,5 cm

Provenance Ex. Jay C. Leff collection, Uniontown, Pennsylvania
Sotheby's Parke Bernet, 31 May 1975
Private collection, New York (acquired from above sale)

Exhibition *Exotic Art from Ancient and Primitive Civilizations – Collection of Jay C. Leff*
Carnegie Institute, Pittsburg, 15 Oct. 1959 - 3 Jan. 1960, n° 706
Ancient Art of Latin America, from the Collection of Jay C. Leff
Brooklyn Museum, 22 Nov. 1966 - 5 March 1967, n° 529

The Chancay civilization developed on the central coast of Peru, in the later part of the Inca Empire, from about 1000 to 1470 AD. The most well-known Chancay artefacts are the textiles which ranged from embroidered pieces to different types of fabrics decorated with paint, and the wood carvings, characterized by their simplicity, sobriety and use of shapes from nature. Human heads and masks were the most common wooden objects. They were used to crown the mummies of important dignitaries, as a mark of their status as deity or mythical ancestor, which they acquired after death. This large and highly abstracted example has a prominent arched nose, and inset clam shell eyes. The mouth is suggested by a slight incision, while the forehead is covered by an imposing headgear made of a woven textile having a tan geometric pattern, with a central decorative element of white chicken feathers attached to braided strings. The muted expression on the flat geometrical face is an image of startling modernity, reminiscent of the best creations of Paul Klee or Alexei Jawlensky.



Exhibition view at the Brooklyn Museum in 1966



54 AN IMPORTANT WERE-JAGUAR MASK

Olmec culture, Veracruz region, Mexico, 900-400 BC
Altered serpentine (laboratory report MSMAP 14-134 OA)
Height : 16,5 cm

Provenance Ex. collection of painter Roberto Donis, New York (before 1969)
Private European collection

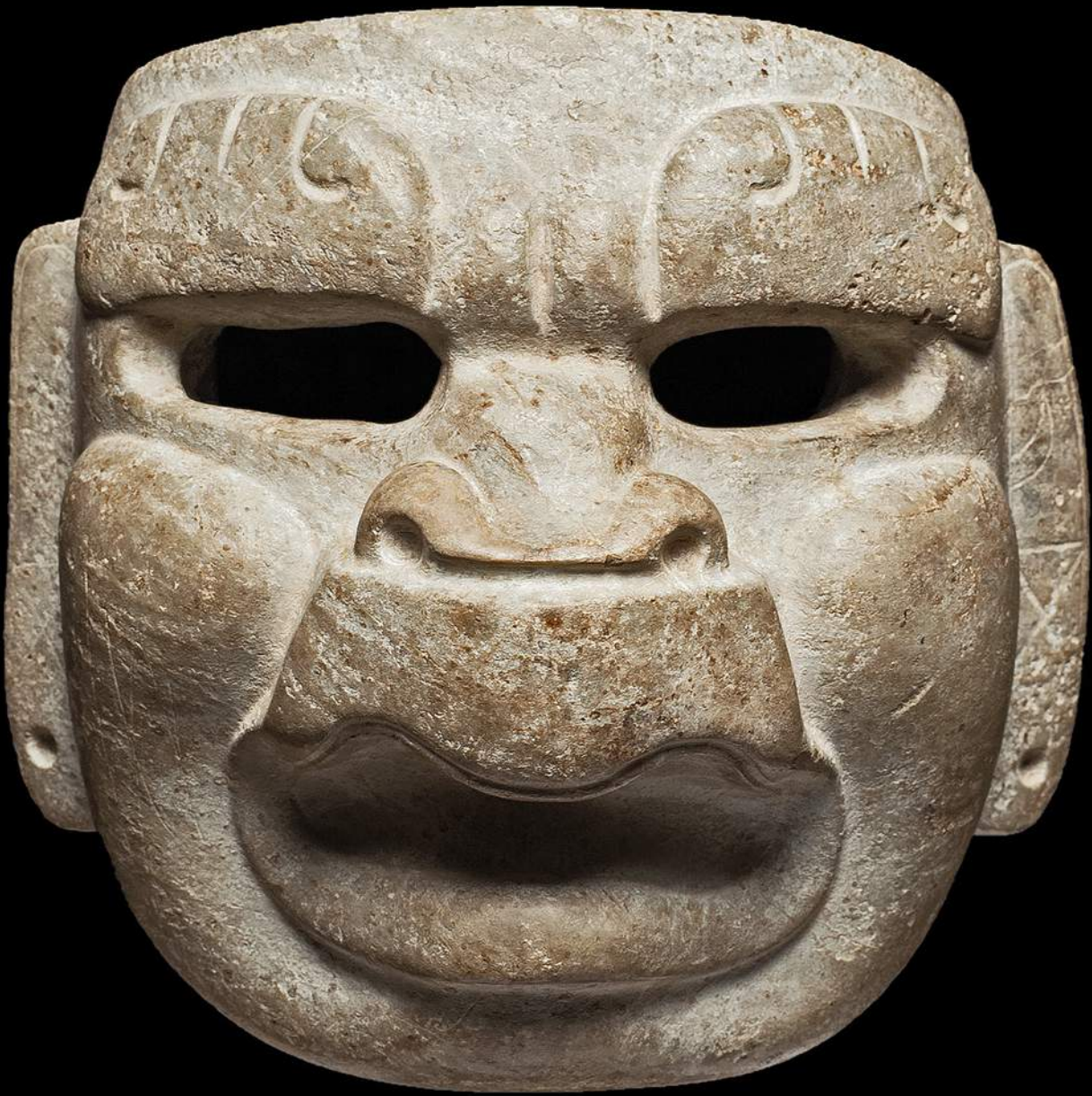
Bibliography *Les masques Olmèques*, Caterina Magni, 2015, p. 153, fig. 5

Before it entered a European private collection, this mask from Veracruz (Mexico) belonged to the Pre-Columbian art collector Roberto Donis. Sculpted in altered serpentine, the object measures 16,5 cm high and 16,8 cm wide.

Here, the carver used all sorts of contrasts. First by opposing projecting and hollow parts. Then with the polishing work, by creating various types of finish for the stone (smooth and shiny or rough and opaque). The result of this particular approach is a deliberately varied surface, with a subtle contrast between shadow and light. In hypothetical ritual use, the piece must have produced impressive lighting effects.

The piece represents a *were*-jaguar suggesting the early steps of the man-feline metamorphosis. The hybrid being, an emblematic figure of Olmec art, is identifiable through its conventional attributes which include : oblong eyes (here in openwork), flame-shaped eyebrows, a V-shaped slit shown by a deep groove, a trapezoidal mouth with toothless gums, a flat nose, and elongated ears (pierced with small holes). The right nostril has been restored. Glyphs like Saint-Andrew’s Cross (or “Olmec cross”) are finely incised on the surface of the stone. The X-shaped cross, which is often associated to the feline figure, is a power emblem with a strong cosmologic value since it refers to the division of the universe into four quarters. Moreover, it symbolizes darkness, the world of the dead, and it revolves around the sacrificial sphere. A motif made of three parallel lines (two of which with one end curved towards the top of the piece) is carved underneath each eyebrow. Several suspension holes placed in less visible parts of the piece may have been designed to hang the artefact on other elements. (Magni, 2015)

N. B. : Roberto Donis (1934–2008) was a Mexican painter and art teacher born in the small town of Venado, San Luis Potosi. In 1962 and 1963, he lived in Paris and studied art history at the École du Louvre. During this time, he came into contact with various avant-garde artists. He also developed lifelong friendships with Mexican artists Rufino Tamayo, Francisco Toledo and Jorge Dubon. From 1966 to 1969 he lived in New York. His relationship with Toledo led him to settle in Oaxaca after he returned to Mexico in 1970, acquiring a large house in the small town of Santa María de Tule, near the city of Oaxaca.



55 RARE FRAGMENT OF A *WERE*-JAGUAR MASK

Olmec culture, Pacific Coast of Guatemala, 1300-400 BC
Jadeite
Width : 14,8 cm

Provenance Private collection M. Sanchez, before 1970
Private European collection

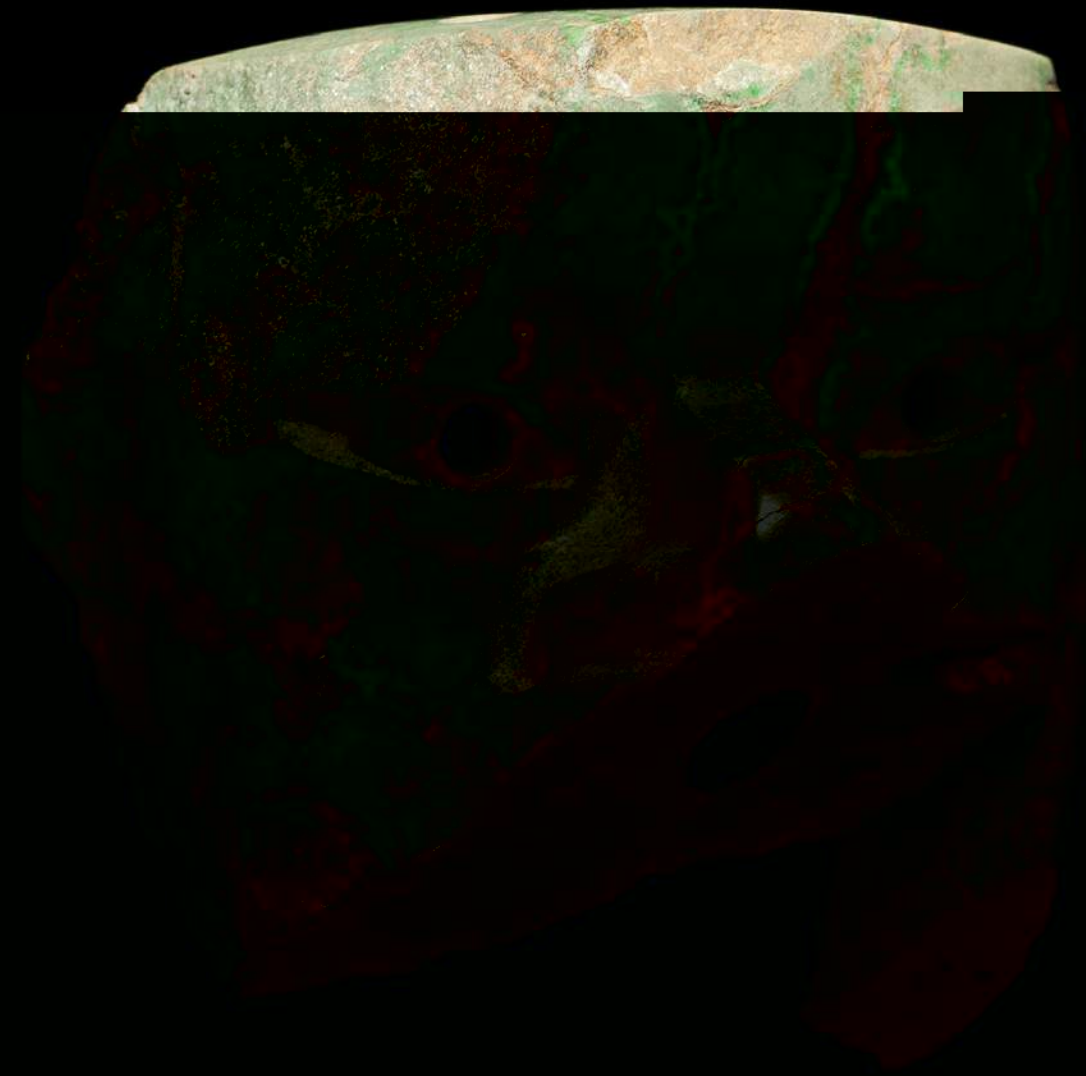
Bibliography *Les masques Olmèques*, Caterina Magni, 2015, p. 152, fig. 4

This jadeite mask reportedly comes from the Pacific Coast of Guatemala, a region inhabited by the Olmec people between 1300 and 400 B.C. as proven by such important ceremonial sites as Takalik Abaj or La Blanca.

The object is 14.5 centimeters high and 14.8 centimeters wide. It is made up of two fragments later reunited in a single one. The reconstruction of the piece reveals the upper part of a *were*-jaguar's face. This English term refers to a hybrid creature, half-human and half-feline, which is omnipresent in the art of the first civilization of Mesoamerica.

The upper part of the object shows the rounded relief of the forehead and of the arch of the eyebrows, the almond-shaped eyes with the wide pierced pupil, the (unfortunately incomplete) flat nose, and a small angle of the feline mouth. The elongated ears, of which only one is complete, are only outlined. The deep-set eyes are placed on an oblique line and give the anthropo-zoomorphic being a fearful appearance while introducing a dynamic power resulting in a slightly mesmerizing gaze.

Although it is incomplete, this hybrid portrait is a perfect example of the high artistic and technical skills reached by Olmec stone carvers. It is easy for Pre-Hispanic art amateurs to imagine the missing part. In doing so, the onlooker pieces together – through his or her imagination – the lower part of the face with the so special trapezoidal mouth of the *were*-jaguar. (Magni, 2015)



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