

# Basic Detail Report

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## Shield

### Date

early to mid 20th Century

### Medium

Wood, paint and plant fiber

### Description

The shields of the Bimin-Kukusmin people and surrounding areas in Papua New Guinea's Sandaun Province show much greater variation in design than the relatively uniform shields of some other provinces. They do, however, sometimes have similar elements of decoration such as diamond “navels” carved in relief. Like many other shields found in Papua New Guinea, symmetrical, geometric design seems to dominate the aesthetic, and blocks of color are used to delineate distinctive shapes. The size and rectangular shape of the shield allows it to be placed either vertically or horizontally on the ground to protect multiple bowmen in

battle during regional conflicts. Papuan shields were designed to protect warriors both physically and spiritually from the chaos of battle. Their bulky forms could easily deflect projectiles like arrows and spears, as well as block attacks from clubs. Carefully carved sculptural elements and painted designs helped warriors to magically draw strength and protection from their ancestors, the spirits of animals, and the land itself. When wars were declared, men repainted their shields with dazzlingly vibrant colors to distract and threaten their enemies. Their designs signaled the status of the carrier, his prowess as a warrior, and his connection to the spiritual world. War, a constant realigning of relationships between opposing tribal neighbors, is woven into the tapestry of daily life in New Guinea. Its three leading causes are all key factors in being the dominant group in a region: disputes over land borders, stolen pigs, and the ownership of women. Both the location and times of battles were scheduled, and the ensuing hostilities could often go on for months culminating in someone being hurt or killed in battle. Once all parties agreed that a fair battle had taken place and reparations were settled, usually in the form of pigs given to the family of the deceased, life would go on until another issue arose.

### Dimensions

77 1/2 × 20 3/4 × 5 1/2 in. (196.9 × 52.7 × 14 cm)