Basic Detail Report

Shield

Date
mid 20th Century

Primary Maker
Asaro

Medium
Tapi tree wood, paint and metal

Description
This shield comes from the Asaro people residing in Papua New Guinea's Eastern Highlands Province. Until very recently war was woven into the fabric of every day life in New Guinea. Every man had his war shield ready for battle. Carefully carved and painted with important objects etched into the wood surface, the designs represented important objects connected to the warrior's ancestors, features from the landscape, and from the bird, animal and human worlds. The design declared the status of the carrier, his strength as a warrior, and his connection to the spiritual world. 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
60 1/2 × 23 3/4 × 3 in. (153.7 × 60.3 × 7.6 cm)