



## Cave Figure (Aripa)

### Date

1600-1800

### Primary Maker

Ewa

### Medium

Wood and paint

### Description

The oldest Karawari River cave figures are approximately 400 to 200 years old and may be some of the earliest existing wood carvings from Melanesia. They tell an important story about the Ewa culture who created them. These figures represent Aripa, who served as a connection between Ewa men and spirits who helped them with hunting. Other figures represent legendary female ancestors who founded the Ewa's village clans. These figures generally lived in spirit houses where they were activated through incantations and magical practices.

When the owner of a figure died, the carving was moved to the caves where it served as a memorial. This practice shielded the cave figures from harsh environmental factors, offered protection for the memorial, and preserved the craftsmanship and ceremonial tradition of the Ewa people for future generations. Remains of paints like what was used for cave painting can still be seen on this archaic sculpture.

### Dimensions

20 3/4 × 1 1/8 × 3 5/8 in. (52.7 × 2.9 × 9.2 cm)