



Spirit Figure (Yipwon)

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Yimam

Medium

Wood and pigment

Description

This is a yipwon sculpture made by the Yimam people of Papua New Guinea's Korewori River. These skeletal figures vary in size but all have a large head, opposing curved ribs surrounding their "heart," and stand on one foot. The mythology behind this sculpture is that the spirit of the Sun was carving the first slit gong during his time on earth and the pieces came alive as spirit called yipwon. One day these spirits killed one of the Sun's male relatives and drank his blood. They stretched themselves out against the wall of the house and turned into wood.

The Sun ascended into the sky in anger while the yipwon remained on Earth as a punishment as spirits of warfare and hunting. Large yipwon sculptures are owned collectively by clans, while smaller examples are individually owned and carried in bags by their owners to bring success in hunting and battle.

Dimensions

46 × 3 1/2 × 7 1/8 in. (116.8 × 8.9 × 18.1 cm)