



Ancestor Figure (NgwallIndu)

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Abelam

Medium

Wood and pigment

Description

This Wapinyan ancestor figure (NgwallIndu) comes from the Abelam people residing in the East Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea. Integral to the fabric of the spiritual life of the Abelam people is the growing and exchanging of yams. Although the primary role of this object is to honor deceased ancestors, every object of artistic production, including this figure, would be displayed at the annual Yam Festival. Produced after a respected elder passes away, this figure would have been kept in the Spirit House (Haus Tambaran) in a prominent place. Small

figures are also made to represent Wapinyan and have been variously identified as "long" yam children, yam spirit portraits, and as specifically named clan ancestors. These may be male or female and are found in Spirit Houses as well as ceremonial yam warehouses. At the beginning of the yam growing cycle, small seedlings are placed against them to encourage "long" yam cultivation, and female figures are said to specifically look after the development of their yam counterparts.

Dimensions

46 × 7 × 8 1/2 in. (116.8 × 17.8 × 21.6 cm)