

Basic Detail Report



Dance Mask (Vungvung)

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Baining

Medium

Bark cloth, bamboo cane and paint

Description

This fire dance mask comes from the Baining people residing on the Gazelle Peninsula in Papua New Guinea's East New Britain Province. Although the mask looks cumbersome, it is in fact very lightweight. Constructed from cane reeds, bark cloth, and other materials that disintegrate very easily, the masks of the fire dance are constructed over months and danced only for a few minutes before they are, in most cases, left to decompose in the forest. Baining masks represent forest leaves and animals both real and imaginary. Many are made for the noted fire dance mask during which dancers walk through fire, kicking up sparks of burning embers. The four faces of this mask may represent the leaf spirit, a leaf used in ceremonial cooking and from a tree regarded to have the ability to absorb evil. Fire Dance masks are traditionally worn by men who, wearing leaves and penis sheaths, dance around and through fire. This dance is traditionally associated with hunting, male spirits, and more recently initiation to male adulthood and death. It is a dance regularly performed for tourists. The red and black pigment symbolizes female (black) and male (red). The vertical poles may have once held in place curtains of bark cloth that obscured the dancer.

Dimensions

65 × 53 × 148 1/2 in. (165.1 × 134.6 × 377.2 cm)