



War Charm

Date

mid 20th Century

Medium

Wood, fiber, ceramic and feathers

Description

In times of warfare, warriors from the Admiralty Islands equipped themselves with war charms as means of supernatural defense against the perils of combat. The war charm presented here is an interesting marriage of new and old design styles. The form of the war charm dates at least as far back as the early nineteenth century—likely much further—but the beads seen here are evidently a more recent addition not seen on older examples of these charms. Neck ornaments of a similar design appeared to have only been made by specific cultures, such as the Matankol people of northern Manus Island, and traded for other valuable commodities with neighboring groups. Found throughout the archipelago, these ornaments were known by an assortment of names including brangera, laluan, wage, and keindin. The war charm presented here features a commonly found design that consists of a wooden figure head adorned with flaring base made from the clipped black wing feathers of a

frigate bird. An early version of this design utilized human bones from a deceased ancestor in a similar style. In regards to the figure head, the village of Batussi on Manus Islands specified the wooden head carving is meant to represent Pondoken—a mythical warrior who defeated many enemies. The figure head is often painted with blood red and white pigments. The beads featured on this particular object are not commonly found on older designs and may indicate that this object was crafted for commodity purpose. Warriors would adorn these neck ornaments on the nape of their necks and secure them tightly with a necklace of cordage that would project the feathers horizontally and create dramatic appearance fit for warfare. They believed that the war charm possessed supernatural powers that would render the wearer invulnerable to his enemies and enable him to wield his weapon victorious in battle. By the early twentieth century, colonialism brought an end to warlike activities in the area and war charms became a source of revenue. Contemporary Admiralty islanders continue to produce war charms and adorn them primarily as dance regalia.

Dimensions

22 × 3 3/8 × 3 in. (55.9 × 8.6 × 7.6 cm)