



## Door Board (Amitung)

### Date

1920-1930

### Primary Maker

Telefolmin

### Medium

Wood and pigment

### Description

The Telefolmin are one of several related highland peoples known as the “Min” or “Mountain Ok” who live in the Star Mountains, located at the source of the Sepik River in Sanduan Province, Papua New Guinea. They derive their name from Telefolip Village, their ancestral home and cultural center. As with other Mountain Ok people, the Telefolmin have separate housing for men, women, and children. Telefolmin houses tend to be built in a simple “A-frame” design, and are usually slightly elevated off the ground with stilts or a raised earthen

foundation. Despite this simplistic architecture and general lack of decorative artwork, the Telefolmin are famous for the fine carved door boards that adorn the fronts of most of their houses. The door boards are called amitung, and are carved from planks made of large softwood trees. Each door board has a unique design, although they always feature similar spiral and geometric motifs and are painted with red, white, and black pigments. Skilled artists are usually commissioned to carve the door boards. In addition to their payment, they are given food for the duration of the project and a gift of pork upon its successful completion. The first step for an artist carving a door board is to draw a design with charcoal on the selected plank. The areas around the design are then cut away, leaving a low-relief image. Finally, the artist paints the board, using black for the raised areas and red and white for the recessed areas. Although the finished door boards are quite beautiful, they are meant to serve more than just aesthetic purposes. The door boards are typically about 9 feet tall, but only have 2-foot high openings. These small holes help keep the houses warm in the cold mountain climates by retaining heat. In the past, they were also meant to be easily defended in the case of an enemy attack. The sturdiness of these door boards ensured that they could be used over several generations. Luckily, this also means that their beauty will be preserved for many more generations to come.

### Dimensions

109 1/2 × 33 1/2 × 1 1/8 in. (278.1 × 85.1 × 2.9 cm)