



Ancestor Figure (Tau Tau)

Date

c. 1980

Medium

Wood, paint, textile, hair and glass

Description

This female Ancestor Figure, known as a Tau tau, represents the Sa'Dan Toraja culture residing in Indonesia's South Sulawesi Province, and it dates to c. 1980. Tau tau from the Sa'Dan Toraja culture are sculpted to represent the deceased. Traditionally, the figures have played a central role in elaborate funerals, being placed near the dead during the ceremonies which sometimes lasted up to a week. To create their lifelike appearance, the artists would use real human hair and dress the figure with the deceased's clothing and jewelry. After the funeral, the Tau tau would be placed on a rock cliff with other carved effigies who oversaw the well-being of their

people. Historically, wooden Tau tau were reserved for those of higher social ranking, whereas those of lower ranking might receive a temporary sculpture of bamboo with a carved wooden mask. Today, partially due to the influence of Christianity, the Tau tau plays a less significant part in the ceremonial and spiritual lives of the Sa'Dan Toraja people. The effigies have become more realistic in their appearance than ever, and artists display their carvings in workshops open to the public. This particular Tau tau is more recent, and has been carved with minute attention to detail, especially in the facial features. Her hair is tied back and consists of golden strands with streaks of grey. Her eyes are painted on. The arms are bent at the elbow and one hand lays flat. The figure is dressed in a woven batik blouse and wrap-around skirt, or sarong, in muted brown, green, red, blue, and yellow.

Dimensions

58 × 19 × 21 in. (147.3 × 48.3 × 53.3 cm)