

Basic Detail Report



Headdress (Wagnen)

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Abelam

Medium

Wood and paint

Description

This headdress, vernacular name known as Wagnen, was collected from the Abelam people living in the Maprik area of the Prince Alexander Mountains in Papua New Guinea. Among the Abelam, the masks and the mask dancers serve as mediators between the realms of the dead and the living. They represent the intrusion of the other world into this one, and their appearance in the village marks the beginning of a ritual period of initiation and of the yam festival. During the initiation rituals, each young man must conquer a baba spirit. Armed with a spear, his victory restores the order of time and space upset by the baba spirit. Only the men that have passed through the initiation ritual called Kara can themselves dance in the Yam Costumes. Although the masks may suggest a human face, they actually depict animal spirits. Formerly worn by warriors, these costumes are now only worn during Festival celebrations around the yam festival.

Dimensions

37 1/8 × 50 1/4 × 3 in. (94.3 × 127.6 × 7.6 cm) with stand: 41 7/8 × 20 1/4 × 3 in. (106.4 × 51.4 × 7.6 cm)