



Spirit Figure (Noukwi)

Date

mid 20th Century

Primary Maker

Kwoma

Medium

Wood and pigment

Description

This large wooden standing female figure, vernacularly referred to as Noukwi, was collected from the Washkuk Hills in the Middle Sepik River region of the East Sepik Province in Papua New Guinea. The Kwoma are known for their unique artistic practice centered on the annual sequence of ceremonies devoted to the cultivation of yams. According to the Kwoma, the yam is a mystical food and should not be eaten until the spirits responsible for the yam's enormous growth have been properly honored. Following the harvesting of the large root vegetable, the spirits are presented with an arrangement of three ceremonies: known as yena, mindja, and noukwi. Each ceremony requires the creation of a specific type of figure. In the final ceremony, restricted only to senior initiated men and involves the display of female figures—

such as the one seen here.

Dimensions

55 × 9 1/2 × 7 in. (139.7 × 24.1 × 17.8 cm)