



Wave Splitter Finial (Munkuris)

Date

mid 20th Century

Primary Maker

Massim

Medium

Wood

Description

A canoe prow ornament, colloquially referred to as munkuris, collected from the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea. Munkuris were an integral part of the outrigger canoes used for kula trade voyages in the Massim region. These elaborately carved ornamentations often came in pairs and were affixed on the tops wave splitters. Each pair of munkuris were identical in design, given that kula canoes had canoe two "front" ends that

allow the vessels to be rigged and sailed in either direction. According to some researchers, the symbolism of "taking flight" was frequently associated with the act of kula voyages and the kula trade cycle. The Massim conceptualized the notion of flight in their repetitive use of bird motifs on the carved parts of their kula vessel—including the canoe prow ornament. The bird motifs featured on munkuris are depicted as open-winged to invoke the sense of flight. Munkuris also function as a protective charm and are believed to channel a form of sorcery that contributes to the safety of the voyage.

Dimensions

29 3/4 × 6 1/2 × 3/8 in. (75.6 × 16.5 × 1 cm)