



Currency (Tabu)

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Tolai

Medium

Shell, wood and fishing line

Description

This shell ring currency, also referred to as tabu, was collected from the East New Britain Province of Papua New Guinea. A tabu is constructed from several rings of strung shells. In many Melanesian communities, shells

were used as a form of currency and simultaneously as supplies for high-priced ornamentation. As a form of currency, shells were used in trades along the coast and nearby islands. The further distance a shell traveled, the higher their value would increase. Therefore, the price and social value of an adornment increased depending on the inclusion of a well-traveled shell. As a form of adornment, a shell will signify important qualities about the wearer's wealth, initiation level within a clan membership, and ideas of ritual practice. The use of shells as adornments also developed into a reflection of wearer's individual notions of beauty and attractiveness. In war ornamentation, men use shells as an indicator of societal recognition for their achievements and to convey their view of strength as beauty. Ornamentation satisfies the individual's personal desire for beautification while allowing for the expression of personality according to social norms.

Dimensions

3 × 12 in. (7.6 × 30.5 cm)