



Grade Statue

Date

20th Century

Medium

Tree fern root

Description

Grade statues from the Banks Islands are similar to those made on the nearby islands of Vanuatu, examples of which can be seen in this gallery. They too signify an individual's passing into a higher rank and status among the living and the spirits worlds. Moving up in grade is achieved by completing tasks, both political and religious, that become more rigorous the higher one ascends. In the Banks Islands grade statues are placed in front of private homes as symbols of the owner's wealth and most likely as symbols of the powerful ancestors the inhabitants are aligned with. Factors like limited food, high rates of disease, and constant battles over land made traditional life throughout Melanesia uncertain at the best of times. In an effort to control these unknowns and improve their lives, the peoples of New Guinea often turned to gods,

spirits of the forest, and their own ancestors. Every village found a unique balance between the physical and spiritual worlds, using belief systems and ritual objects developed over thousands of generations to influence outcomes for the better. Consequently, what has evolved in New Guinea is today one of the world's richest animistic belief systems as witnessed through the island's art.