

Basic Detail Report



Grade Statue

Date

20th Century

Medium

Tree fern root, ochre, and pigments

Description

In the Vanuatu island communities, large carved statues honor ancestors. The figures were often erected near the men's house in conjunction with celebrations marking an individual's elevation to a new rank or status. Carved from the trunks of fern-wood trees, the ancestor statutes were originally covered with mud plaster and painted colors. The large head symbolizes the ancestor's spiritual power, or mana. 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.

Dimensions

92 × 14 × 16 in. (233.7 × 35.6 × 40.6 cm)