



Shield

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Maasai

Medium

Leather, wood, pigment and lion fur

Description

This is a shield made by the Maasai from Tanzania sometime in the 20th century. Maasai shields are made from buffalo hide stretched over a wooden frame. The black dye is created from the burnt skins of gourds, the white is made from a specific local clay, and the red is made by mixing blood or the sap of *solanum campylae* with clay. The designs hold great importance to the Maasai of Southern Kenya. Collectively called *sirata*, they denote a lineage system which has since fallen into disuse, not unlike a coat of arms. Various designs each

had different names and meanings. For example, the symbol within the proper left side's half circle shows the shield's owner killed a lion. To further prove this a small swatch of lion fur attached to the shield. This along with the red pigment used on the shield indicate that the shield was most likely used by a *moran*, a warrior herder. In addition to hunting and warfare, shields also played an important cultural role in Maasai society as objects used in rites of passage. The name of the shield's owner, *Komoconok*, is written within the semi-circle on the proper right side of the shield.

Dimensions

43 × 29 1/4 × 7 in. (109.2 × 74.3 × 17.8 cm)