



## Shield

### Date

early 20th Century

### Primary Maker

latmul

### Medium

Wood, plant fiber, and pigment

### Description

The latmul are the largest cultural group living along the shores of the Sepik River. As a large group, their shields vary widely depending on region, but for almost all of these some form of incised anthropomorphic face is found along the shield. Informants have attributed varying meanings to the faces. Sometimes it is explained to be human, denoting a connection to one's ancestors. It has alternatively been explained that the face is that of a bush spirit (wunjumbu), water spirit (wanjimbaut), or a men's house spirit (kundima). The shields of the

Blackwater and middle Karawari Rivers also feature faces, but rather than having only one central face, a number of faces line these significantly taller shields. These tend to be an average of about 80 in. in height as opposed to most other latmul shields which average 60 in. Here we see that the traditional vertical ridge is informally created by the prominent noses of the faces. If this shield ever was painted, no pigment remains. The dug-out back allowed for a rattan cross-piece and wooden grip to be attached to firmly secure the shield to one's off-hand.

### Dimensions

90 1/8 × 12 3/4 × 6 1/4 in. (228.9 × 32.4 × 15.9 cm)