

Basic Detail Report



Bowl

Date

late 19th Century

Primary Maker

Matankol

Medium

Wood and parinarium nut paste

Description

Of the many types of wooden bowl from the Admiralty Islands, no single design is better recognized than that of the large feast bowl with decorative spiral handles. During German Colonial rule of New Guinea, when many of these large bowls were collected, the island of Lou in the Matankol region of the Admiralty Islands was the only major production center for these high-quality bowls. From there they were traded throughout the region. The exact inspiration for the signature spirals of the handles has been subject to some debate amongst ethnographers, but they were likely unique clan totems. Other inspirations may have been animal forms such as the tail of the cuscus, tusks of the pig, or shell of the sea snail. Though the same spiral form is found at the prow and stern of Admiralty Island canoes, evidence suggests that the canoe design was based upon the bowls and not the other way around. Very little is known about the manufacturing process of these bowls except that they would have been fire-hollowed and then carved using available tools such as shell knives and sting ray tail awls, likely by men. Finally, the wood is smoothed with fish skin files or pumice. The exquisitely carved handles were attached to the bowls using an adhesive made using parinarium nut. The bowls played a number of varying important uses in the cultures of the Admiralty Islands, but as they were rarer than their basketry counterparts these were generally reserved for special events like bride price feasts, initiation ceremonies, and funerals all of which involved feasting. They could contain great supplies of staple foods such as taro and sweet potatoes, liquids such as soups made from sago and pork broth, or even coconut oil which would have been brought by guests to bride price feasts.

Dimensions

23 3/4 × 54 × 41 in. (60.3 × 137.2 × 104.1 cm)