

# Basic Detail Report

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## Bowl (Kwam)

**Date**  
19th to 20th Century

**Primary Maker**  
Abelam

**Medium**  
Clay

### Description

A kwam refers to a ceremonial eating vessel made by the Abelam people in the Maprik district. These pots were customarily painted and are characterized by designs of simplified faces that are arranged longitudinally around the vessel in a chain-like sequence. The designs were always carved roughly in a casual freehand style. In Abelam pottery, kwam vessels were only used in the haus tambaran—a men’s house where ritualistic, cult activities would take place. Young male initiates would eat only the “white soup” made from coconut, taro and yam; this ceremonial rite of passage would be served out of a kwam. These pots were always crafted and decorated by men, solely to be used by men. The tradition of crafting kwam vessels for ritualistic activities has all but disappeared, instead they are now made for commercial sale. Even amidst the onslaught of modernity, the Abelam people still respect and abide by the strict sanctions and taboos surrounding such an important vessel as they continue to only allow men to decorate and paint the vessels that they commercialize.

### Dimensions

12 3/8 × 10 3/4 × 10 3/8 in. (31.4 × 27.3 × 26.4 cm)