



Mask (Tatanua)

Date

late 20th Century

Medium

Wood, shell, fiber and pigments

Description

This vibrant mask, known as a tatanua, was collected from the Malagan people of New Ireland in Papua New Guinea. The inhabitants of the New Ireland are known for their elaborate visual art forms, known as malagan carvings, prepared primarily for the numerous ritual ceremonies that portray the culture’s view of life progression. The colorful tatanua mask featured here is an integral part of the dance ritual performed during mortuary feasts. Tatanua can immediately be characterized by several distinct features, particularly their arching coiffure. The crest on these masks is made from either an orange or reddish-brown fiber that roughly mimics a hairstyle worn by men in mourning. The wood often comes from lime trees and is lightweight enough that it is ideal for dance masks. Sea snail shells are exclusively used for the eyes of these masks and sometimes as ornaments decorating the remainder of the mask. The panels visible on both sides of the crest are ochre-dyed bark cloth, but this element can vary depending on the subtype of tatanua.

Dimensions

15 3/8 × 8 1/8 × 15 1/4 in. (39.1 × 20.6 × 38.7 cm)