

Basic Detail Report



Wood

Description

Canoe prows from the latmul culture of the Middle Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea are ornamental features used at the head of their dugout canoes to navigate the waterways of the area. For the latmul, life along the river banks is greatly influenced by the natural environment of the river. During the rainy season, the river channels constantly change as the river widens and deepens until it occupies most of the region, making canoe traveling a vital aspect for latmul culture. Canoe prow art from the area often features elaborate carvings of animals prominent to the region, such as crocodiles and warthogs. This particular canoe prow features an intricately incised crocodile head. Crocodiles play a central role in the art and culture of the latmul people, as the motif is often associated with strength, power, and manhood. According to an latmul creation myth, the Earth was initially covered by an ancient ocean, and the crocodile would dive to the bottom and bring back mud masses on its back—which became an island when it surfaced. The land of the island would grow and harden, continuing to rest on the back of the crocodile.

Dimensions

7 1/2 × 30 5/8 × 13 5/8 in. (19.1 × 77.8 × 34.6 cm)

Canoe Prow

Date

early to mid 20th Century

Primary Maker

latmul

Medium