



Dance Shield

Date

mid 20th Century

Medium

Wood and pigment

Description

In the Huon Gulf region, the inhabitants of the Tami Islands are known for their distinctive style of wood carving, often referred to as the Tami style. This unique art style is distinguished by the use of a carving method known as high-relief carving—in which designs are carved into the wood and protrude from the background. This method of carving requires meticulous planning beforehand and great skill tool manipulation to achieve desired effect. The ceremonial shields from the Huon Gulf region are extremely narrow—not great for combat use in warfare—and have a distinguishable projecting vertical handle on the backside. These physical components suggest that the objects would have been used as dance shields. This particular dance shield features high relief carvings of mirrored crowned figureheads and border designs found on the backside. The method of carving and

the detailed border designs are indicative to Tami style craftsmanship. These figureheads may refer to the two brothers of the prevalent story known in Tami as that of Gidging and Gimoling. Ceremonial shield production began to increase as the regulations of colonial powers enforce the end of warfare in these regions. The Tami are brilliant seamen, which allows them to extensively trade their craft goods with the neighboring islands—such as New Guinea, Rook, and Siassi. It is no surprise to find Tami style goods spread over large areas through trade. Due to social restrictions, the distinctive carving style of the Tami remains confined to their community of wood carvers. If any individuals outside the community used a style other than their own the act would constitute as a severe offence.

Dimensions

35 3/8 × 5 3/4 × 3 in. (89.9 × 14.6 × 7.6 cm)