



Mask (Bapa)

Date

early to mid 20th Century

Primary Maker

Abelam

Medium

Fiber and pigment

Description

Bapa or Baba masks are worn by men in the weeks leading up to Abelam initiation ceremonies as a method of scaring women and uninitiated men away from the village's spirit house. There is a high degree of mysticism around the construction of bapa masks, which are made in the spirit house so the uninitiated and women cannot see them being built. Bapa masks tend to be woven from plant fiber and painted in bright reds, whites, and yellows; offset as well by black paint. This particular mask's colors have dulled significantly since it was made in the early

20th Century. Unlike many other Sepik-area masks, bapa masks are rarely decorated in anything but paint. Split sago palm leaf skirts are attached at the base of the masks, helping to conceal the wearer. Designs for these masks tend to be more abstracted and geometrical than the more figurative two and three dimensional ngwalndu found inside spirit houses. This particular mask might be evoking ripples in water, a common Abelam motif.

Dimensions

19 1/2 × 8 × 14 in. (49.5 × 20.3 × 35.6 cm)