



Seated figure

On display

Title/Description: Seated figure

Artist/Maker: .

Born: 1800 - 1899

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Cane, Wood

Measurements: h. 946 x w. 240 x d. 260 mm

Inscription: '9' (in red) and '335' (in white)

Accession Number: 157

Historic Period: 19th century

Production Place: Lower Sepik River, New Guinea, Oceania, Pacific

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

This amazing sculpture illustrates an old or sick person walking with sticks in both hands. It is an image that would be understood by its community and associated with certain stories. The traditional knowledge and skills required to produce this work are unique and evident in the creativity of its design.

During the making of the sculpture traditional chemicals are applied onto the wood. It then must be kept in a safe place for some time for the chemicals to react with the wood, which allows the artist sculpting it to produce the highest quality of work and creativity. The process may also change the colour of the wood. Most of these works are created in a selective environment before being presented to a public audience or community.

Pax Jakupa, February 2023

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

No collection data exists for this large image and only one comparable example has been found in the literature — a sculpture formerly in the De Mire collection which is similar in form, though clearly the work of a different hand (Dr O., 1929: fig. 2.4). The De Mire image is attributed to Irian Jaya, though on what evidence is uncertain, whereas the head, eyes and feet of the present piece suggest a Lower Sepik origin. It has previously been ascribed to the Anggoram/Kambot groups

(Wardwell, 1967: 40).

Given the lack of information about its origin, little can be said about the function of this piece, except that it is almost certainly an image of an ancestor or spirit. Technically it is unrefined, except for the head, yet it is remarkable in over-all concept. The positioning of the projections which extend upwards from the knees, combined with the anatomical distortion, creates a particular balance in which the spaces between the carved elements contribute crucially to the image's success as a sculpture. It is unlikely that the impact would be so great if the knee projections were absent.

The appearance of the surface carving, especially on the lower part of the back, where grooves indicate the passage of a curved adze blade, suggests that stone tools were used. On this evidence the image may well date back to the mid nineteenth century. At some time in the past it has suffered severe insect infestation, while a potentially disastrous split down the body has been prevented by a local repair with cane binding. Steadying supports have been added beneath the right foot and buttock.

Steven Hooper, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) pp. 42-43.

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1954. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
