



Mask

On display

Title/Description: Mask

Born: 1900 - 1999

Object Type: Mask

Materials: Wood

Measurements: h. 267 x w. 170 x d. 105 mm

Accession Number: 244

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Africa, Gabon

Cultural Group: Fang, Shira-Punu

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

The pattern of tribal grouping in Gabon was severely disrupted by slave raiding which continued well into the nineteenth century. Thus, traditional information about the white-faced masks is somewhat limited. They were formerly described as M 'Pongwe or Lumbo, but now Shira-Punu (a linguistic grouping) is the preferred term with, where possible, a subsidiary attribution added. The Shira-Punu group comprises the M'Pongwe, Lumbo, Shira, Punu, Shango, Tsogho, Vuvi and others, and white-faced masks have been recorded among several of these tribes.

This mask is similar to one in the Musée de l'Homme (no. 65 52.1), collected by Philippe Guimiot among Fang living on islands in the Ogowe river, and may be by the same carver. While clearly under Shira-Punu influence, the Fang style of carving accounts for the concave profile and triangular face which give this mask a hybrid appearance, heightened by the omission of the tribal scarifications found on most white-faced masks. White is the colour of the dead, who may be represented by beautiful female ancestral spirit masks which appear in the course of dances honouring the ancestors.

Margaret Carey, 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) p. 174.

Provenance

Formerly belonging to Henri A. Kamer who acquired it from Philippe Guimiot. Kamer went on to sell it to a vendor at Christie's.

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from Mathias Komor in 1966.

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