



Spear head

Not on display

Title/Description: Spear head

Born: 1800 c. - 1999 c.

Object Type: spear

Materials: Bamboo, Coir, Wood

Measurements: h. 578 x w. 110 x d. 87 mm

Accession Number: 517

Historic Period: 19th century, 20th century

Production Place: Malekula, Oceania, Pacific, Vanuatu

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

These wood spear heads with stylised Janus faces, initially reminiscent of New Caledonian sculpture, originate from the north-west area of Malekula in Vanuatu (see Speiser, 1923: pls. 49-50). The wood section is fixed into the end of a bamboo shaft, only a short length of which remains, and is bound with coir cordage. A human bone point was formerly fixed into the tip and the whole spear would originally have been over ten feet long.

It is not clear if such spears were used for fighting or for ritual purposes, such as the spearing of sacrificial pigs. Given that similar sculptures were in European collections and museums by the late nineteenth century, it is possible that the striking treatment of the face in these spear heads inspired avant-garde European artists of the early twentieth century.

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) p. 77.

Provenance

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

