



Dance mask

Not on display

Title/Description: Dance mask

Born: 1900 c. - 1999 c.

Object Type: Mask

Materials: Pigment, Wood

Measurements: h. 410 x w. 210 x d. 210 mm

Accession Number: 526

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Africa, Cameroon

The Bamileke people cluster encompasses many ethnic groups comprising of several chiefdoms, with a common culture, living in the grasslands of the former French Cameroons. Some of the chief administrative/cultural areas of the Bamileke are Bafang, Bafoussam, Bangangté, Bangu, Bangwa and Dschang. In general, Bamileke art is vigorous and full of movement, whether it be arrested movement portrayed or the lively rhythm of interlocking surfaces. Here the crouching animal with a curling tail (perhaps a panther or chameleon) appears to be masked in a way which echoes and complements the form of the main mask. The tilted almond eyes and the half-smile showing teeth are typically Bamileke.

Some Cameroonian students who studied this mask in 1984 said that it came from western Cameroon and was used in dances called *ku'ngga'ng* or *ku'gbe*, in which at least five different types of mask were worn. Such masks were only for male initiates who wore costumes to avoid recognition. When not in use, such a mask was a decorative object and could be owned by anyone. The form is ornamental, and has no symbolism except within the context of the dance. Although carved from seasoned hardwood (probably *ka*), the face mask is quite thin, and so is not heavy. The inside is so well hollowed that visibility from within is excellent.

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. 164.

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from K. J. Hewett in 1973.

Accessioned into the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia circa 1989.
