



# Dance mask, bird form

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## On display

**Title/Description:** Dance mask, bird form

**Object Type:** Mask

**Materials:** Wood

**Measurements:** h. 355 x w. 140 x d. 180 mm

**Accession Number:** 608

**Historic Period:** 20th century

**Production Place:** Africa, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia

**Cultural Group:** Dan

**Credit Line:** Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1975

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The narrow-eyed oval face, grooved on the outer edge, and the beak make this a typical mask of the *gegon* (bird) masquerade. Such masks generally represent the hornbill, which is held to be the king of the birds. The beak is normally edged with a long black fringe of colobus monkey fur; here the unfinished sides of the beak suggest that one was intended, so perhaps the mask was never occupied by a mask spirit.

*Gegonis* a male masquerade, found exclusively among the northern Dan (see Fischer and Himmelheber, 1984). It belongs to the *kagle* (hooked-stick) group of masquerades, so named because the dancer holds hooked sticks which he whirls around at knee level making people jump out of the way. In the rapid whirling dance he frightens women and livestock and knocks pots over; meddling or conceited people may get punished, thus releasing village tensions.

The *gegon* dancer wears rows of cowrie shells above the forehead and a tall cylindrical hat covered with feathers. He has a thick raffia skirt on his hips and a body covering of thick blue and white cloth; he may hold cowtail fly-whisks in each hand and be accompanied by drummers and singers.

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. 116.

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## **Provenance**

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1975 from vendor Aaron Furman out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury. According to Furman, the mask was collected at Flampeau Circle of Man.

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