



**Dance mask**

---

**Not on display**

**Title/Description:** Dance mask

**Measurements:** h. 228 x w. 163 x d. 80 mm

**Accession Number:** 715

**Historic Period:** Late 19th/early 20th century

**Credit Line:** Purchased with support from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust, 1979

---

It is rare to find Dan masks that depict illness in the same decisive way as is found, for example, among the Ibibio and Idoma of Nigeria (see UEA 595). This mask, with one eye half closed with drooping upper lid, seems to belong to Fischer and Himmelheber's category 8 of Dan masquerades, which represent symptoms of illness.

Concerning such masks, they write (1984: 80), 'These face masks should be categorised as "flaw-finding masquerades" rather than as representations of a sick person . . . One is not supposed to laugh at the sight of such a masquerade however much the comic gestures or facial distortions may provoke one to do so. When these masquerades appear, they continually scratch themselves with great vigour, limping about and appearing to collapse. Whoever laughs at them must pay an immediate fine, or else suffer an infliction of the same sort of facial disorder. For this reason mothers shepherd their children indoors . . . thereby avoiding any need to make expiation for their inadvertent laughter. If one of these masqueraders encounters someone with the same symptoms as his own, he . . . says, "Why are you trying to mock me by copying me?" and demands payment of a fine.'

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. 117.

---

---

---

## **Provenance**

Acquired by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Alan Brandt, New York on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1979 out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust.

