



# Work board

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## On display

**Title/Description:** Work board

**Object Type:** Implement

**Materials:** Wood

**Measurements:** h. 572 x w. 80 x d. 7 mm

**Accession Number:** 803

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

**Production Place:** Borneo, Pacific, Southeast Asia

**Cultural Group:** Kayan, Kenyah

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This is another undocumented piece which on stylistic grounds can be attributed to the Kenyah or Kayan of the Sarawak/East Kalimantan border area of central Borneo. It rivals in virtuosity a comparable board, possibly by the same hand, which is illustrated by Barbier (1984: pl. 24). The upper two-thirds is carved as a large guardian spirit figure with circular eyes (formerly inlaid with Dutch coins or shell or bone discs), whose limbs and body dissolve into a complex of scrolls and seven *aso* motifs. It is very thin and light and the back is plain.

Work boards were used by women when making clothing and beadwork panels, or for other household tasks, such as preparing tobacco. This example shows signs of use and would have belonged to an eminent family, since elaborately carved objects such as this and the baby carrier opposite were reserved for those of chiefly status (Sumnik-Dekovich, 1985: 103).

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. 89.

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