



**Owl mask**

---

**Not on display**

**Title/Description:** Owl mask

**Born:** 1880 c.

**Object Type:** Mask

**Materials:** Cane, Fibre, Marine sponge, Opercula, Pigment, Wood

**Measurements:** h. 360 x w. 187 x l. 337 mm

**Accession Number:** 940

**Historic Period:** Late 19th century

**Production Place:** Northern New Ireland

---

Owl masks are rarer than the *tatanua* type (e.g. object 939), though they appear to have been used on similar occasions during dances at the climax of a *malagan* (a complex series of ceremonies and the visual art forms associated with them) cycle. Powdermaker (1933: 126) witnessed such a dance in 1929, when she wrote, 'the men ... have masks very cleverly representing owl heads (*dudul*). The entire body of each dancer is covered with leaves. The dance is in two-line formation, and one line is supposed to represent men and the other their ghosts. It was taught... by a man from the Kockopo district of New Hanover'.

This example is well preserved. It consists of a wood face and ears tied to a cane framework which is covered in bark cloth. Clusters of marine sponge are tied through holes in the wood and bark cloth to form tightly packed rosettes, some of which are now missing. Formerly a fibre beard was tied under the beak (Helfrich, 1973: nos. 112-13). Marine sponge is not common as a mask material, but it does appear on some examples dating to the 1870s (*ibid.*: nos. 6,74-5).

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) pp. 316-317.

---

---

---

---