



Flute finial

Not on display

Title/Description: Flute finial

Born: 1800 - 1950

Object Type: Ornament

Materials: Shell, Wood

Measurements: h 407 x w. 57 x d. 47 mm

Accession Number: 160

Historic Period: 19th century, 20th Century - Early

Production Place: Middle Sepik River, New Guinea, Oceania, Pacific

Cultural Group: Iatmul, Sawos

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

This flute was designed and carved in human form and would have played an important role in traditional performance, and in sending messages and signals to other people in the Iatmul and Sawos area. As well as using the flute during performances, men sometimes blow it to attract young women's attention, if they wish to marry them. For example, in my village, sometimes men blow a flute called a *susarb* which is made of bamboo, an object common to the province.

When the artist created such a work, he would incorporate particular characteristics: the shoulder part of the figure features carved patterns which indicate the actual tattoos designs made on a young man's arm during his initiation period in the *haus man* (men's house), something that is still practised today. The shell indicates the eye, which allows the sculpture to 'see'. This amazing flute required great skill and knowledge of carving on the part of the artist of the time.

Pax Jakupa, February 2023

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

This is most probably the finial from a sacred flute, a highly valued item used during the rituals by which young men were initiated into the secret's of the men's group (UEA 158). The stick would have been bound into the end of the bamboo flute, and the male half-figure would formerly have had many shell, feather and fibre pendants attached through the apertures in the ears and nose, and also through the openwork panel on the abdomen.

This piece most probably comes from the Iatmul or Sawos peoples of the Middle Sepik, but it is not possible to give a specific cultural attribution because not only were objects traded and exchanged between groups, but carving styles were also copied. It is similar in some respects to a Iatmul example in Wardwell (1967: 64). A single shell remains in the right eye and the neck has been broken and repaired.

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. 50.

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1939. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
