



Male mask

Not on display

Title/Description: Male mask

Born: 1800 - 1999

Object Type: Mask

Materials: Wood

Measurements: h. 310 x w. 150 x d. 95 mm

Accession Number: 216

Historic Period: 19th century, 20th century

Production Place: Africa, Côte d'Ivoire

Cultural Group: Baule

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

In discussing this mask, Leon Underwood (1948: pl. 15) refers to its 'very human expression'. Some of this is to be explained by the understated facial scarification, and the beard which fans out like a real one, unlike the commoner cylindrical twists or plaits (cf. UEA 684a). There is also a feeling of portraiture in the face, strengthened by the absence of stylised features such as strongly-marked eyebrows. Furthermore, study of the finer Baule masks shows that their apparent symmetry is an optical illusion. Since the human face, however regular, is itself composed of two separate halves, the imbalance in such masks as this is a humanising trait.

Traces of what may be a bird claw on the surviving right-hand part of the crown perhaps explain the deficiency of the rest of the mask summit, which, had there been a bird there, might have been broken away at the same time. In that respect, this mask somewhat resembles UEA 213, though in terms of projecting the image of a real human being, there can be no equation. The mask is made of dark, rather heavy wood; there are signs of domed upholstery nails used to ornament the forehead close to the hairline.

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. 137.

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from Suzanne Vérité (Galerie Carrefour) in 1936.

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