



Dance mask, bird form

On display

Title/Description: Dance mask, bird form

Object Type: Mask

Materials: Wood

Measurements: h. 355 x w. 140 x d. 180 mm

Accession Number: 608

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Africa, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia

Cultural Group: Dan

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1975

The narrow-eyed oval face, grooved on the outer edge, and the beak make this a typical mask of the *gegon* (bird) masquerade. Such masks generally represent the hornbill, which is held to be the king of the birds. The beak is normally edged with a long black fringe of colobus monkey fur; here the unfinished sides of the beak suggest that one was intended, so perhaps the mask was never occupied by a mask spirit.

Gegonis a male masquerade, found exclusively among the northern Dan (see Fischer and Himmelheber, 1984). It belongs to the *kagle* (hooked-stick) group of masquerades, so named because the dancer holds hooked sticks which he whirls around at knee level making people jump out of the way. In the rapid whirling dance he frightens women and livestock and knocks pots over; meddling or conceited people may get punished, thus releasing village tensions.

The *gegon* dancer wears rows of cowrie shells above the forehead and a tall cylindrical hat covered with feathers. He has a thick raffia skirt on his hips and a body covering of thick blue and white cloth; he may hold cowtail fly-whisks in each hand and be accompanied by drummers and singers.

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. 116.

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1975 from vendor Aaron Furman out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury. According to Furman, the mask was collected at Flampeau Circle of Man.
