



Panel from a vault

Not on display

Title/Description: Panel from a vault

Object Type: Relief

Materials: Wood

Measurements: h 1067 x w. 600 x d. 35 mm

Accession Number: 852

Historic Period: 19th/20th century

Production Place: Borneo, Pacific, Southeast Asia

Cultural Group: Kayan, Kenyah

The Kenyah and Kayan of the Kalimantan and Sarawak border area of interior Borneo placed their dead in timber-panelled funerary vaults (*salong*), raised on top of one or more large pillars (Hose and McDougall, 1912: II: pl. 156). *Salong*, made for people of high status, were carved or painted with faces and images of guardian spirits, who protected the corpse and soul of the deceased from evil influences (Avé and King, 1986: 58).

This pale hardwood panel is almost certainly from the end of such a vault, having two projections for slotting into the floor and two vertical apertures to accommodate the side wall panels. The hole at the top is probably for a ridgepole to support the roof. Its age is uncertain, but it is considerably eroded at the lower part of the back, probably indicating that it had been in contact with a funerary bundle for some time. White encrustations and lichen have been cleaned off by a previous owner.

The face is of comparatively simple form, with few tendril-like embellishments; the diminutive hands appear to take the form of two plain *aso* dog-dragon heads in profile.

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. 90-91.
