Finch & Co



WEST AFRICAN, LIBERIAN, IVORY COAST DAN PERFORMANCE MASK

A FINE WEST AFRICAN, LIBERIAN, IVORY COAST DAN PERFORMANCE MASK
KNOWN AS A 'BAGLE' MASK
HOLES REMAIN ON THE CHIN FOR THE ATTACHMENT OF A VEGETAL FIBRE BEARD
OLD SMOOTH POLISHED BLACK AND BROWN PATINA
EARLY 20TH CENTURY
SIZE: 23CM HIGH, 16CM WIDE – 9 INS HIGH, 6¼ INS WIDE

LITERATURE

THIS 'BAGLE' MASK WITH ITS TYPICAL TUBULAR EYES WAS USED TO ENTERTAIN; THE WEARER WOULD DANCE AND BEAT THE MUSICIANS WITH A CURVED STICK THROWING ANY OBJECT AROUND THAT OBSTRUCTED THE WAY. IT IS SAID THAT THESE PERFORMANCE MASKS WERE INSPIRED BY DREAMS SENT TO MEN BY FOREST SPIRITS WHO WISHED TO BE MANIFESTED AND HONOURED IN THE HUMAN COMMUNITY.

EACH FACEMASK HAD ITS OWN NAME WHICH ALLUDED TO ITS SPECIFIC NATURE OR POWERS AND ITS OWN 'PORTER' A MAN WHO PERFORMED WEARING IT. AT HIS DEATH THE MASK PASSED ONTO ANOTHER MEMBER OF HIS FAMILY WHO HAD BEEN INDICATED BY SPIRIT INSPIRED SIGNS. THERE EXISTED A STRICT RULE THAT THE HUMAN 'PORTER' MUST NEVER IDENTIFY HIMSELF AS THE MASK WEARER OR UTTER A PUBLIC STATEMENT ON HIS RELATIONSHIP TO A MASK, IN ORDER TO PROTECT HIS PUBLIC PERSONA FROM THAT OF THE MASK'S SPIRIT OWNER AND LINEAGE. ALL PERFORMANCE MASKS BELONGED TO THE MEMBERS OF A LINEAGE, NOT THE INDIVIDUAL WEARER, AND THE LINEAGE ELDERS SUPERVISED ALL PERFORMANCES.