

Finch & C^o



RARE WEST AFRICAN, SOUTHEAST NIGERIA, IBO/AFIKPO PEOPLES CEREMONIAL CALABASH MASK

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MD 20TH CENTURY

SIZE: 31CM HIGH, 27.5CM WIDE, 14.5CM DEEP – 12¼ INS HIGH, 10¾ INS WIDE, 5¾ INS DEEP

LITERATURE

THESE UNUSUAL MASKS MADE FROM CALABASH ARE WORN BY NOVICES DURING THEIR INITIATION. SIMILAR MASKS WITH VERTICAL FIBRE EXTENSIONS ARE WORN IN RITUALS AMONG THE NEIGHBOURING NKPORO ADA PEOPLE. THE MALE ONLY, PRIVATE RITUAL DANCES CAN INCLUDE MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED MASKED INITIATES RANGING IN AGE FROM FIVE YEARS TO THEIR EARLY TWENTIES.

EARLY EUROPEAN TRAVELLERS FOUND THE CALABASH STARTLING AS NOTHING QUITE LIKE IT EXISTED AT HOME. IN 1623 ASTLEY DESCRIBED 'THE CALABASH TREE IS TO BE MET WITHIN THE WESTERN COASTS OF AFRICA... THE CALABASHES GROW IN DIFFERENT FIGURES AND SIZES. THE BARK IS THIN, NOT EXCEEDING THE BREADTH OF HALF A CROWN, BUT IT IS VERY TOUGH. THE WOOD IS VERY SMOOTH AND TAKES A GOOD POLISH.....'