Finch & Co



WEST AFRICAN NORTH EASTERN NIGERIA IGBO MAIDEN SPIRIT MASK 'MMUO'

A FINE WEST AFRICAN NORTH EASTERN NIGERIA IGBO MAIDEN SPIRIT MASK 'MMUO' CARVED OF LIGHT FINE GRAINED WOOD WITH RIBBED HORNS SMALL ELLIPTICAL EYES AND SCROLL EARS AN OPEN MOUTH SHOWING TEETH ABOVE A SMALL DIMPLED CHIN

OLD DRY SMOOTH PATINA AREAS OF NATURAL POLISH

A LABEL TO THE REVERSE FOR BERKELEY GALLERIES AND INVENTORY NO. 4814A

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

SIZE: 29.5CM HIGH, 12CM WIDE, 7CM DEEP – 11½ INS HIGH, 4¾ INS WIDE, 2¾ INS DEEP

LITERATURE

IGBO MASKS ARE HIGHLY VARIED IN SHAPE AND STYLE AND DIFFER REGION TO REGION, CHANGING OVER TIME. THIS MASK WAS USED IN A DRY SEASON FESTIVAL MASQUERADE CALLED 'OKPEREGEDE' WHICH IS DANCED ANNUALLY BY THE NORTH EASTERN IGBO GROUPS TO THE SOUND OF A ZOOMORPHIC SLIT DRUM OF THE SAME NAME. FOUR TO NINE CHARACTERS TAKE PART AND EACH ROLE, RANGING FROM SATIRICAL TO STATELY, IS DANCED BY A MAN. THE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTER IS ASUFU, A LEGENDARY WARRIOR.

MAIDEN SPIRIT MASKS ARE ALWAYS DECORATED WITH WHITE PIGMENT AS LIGHT COMPLEXIONS WERE PREFERRED. WHITENESS AND CHALK WERE ASSOCIATED WITH THE SPIRIT WORLD, HONESTY AND CLEAR SIGHTEDNESS. MAIDENS ARE THE PRIDE OF THEIR FATHERS AND A SOURCE OF BRIDE WEALTH UPON THEIR MARRIAGE. THE MASKS EMBODY THE IDEALS OF YOUTHFUL FEMININE BEAUTY WHICH HAS BOTH PHYSICAL AND MORAL DIMENSIONS FOR THE IGBO. DANCING WITH GRACE AND DIGNITY TO REFLECT HER FINE UPBRINGING, HER SMOOTH SKIN AND FACIAL TATTOOS WILL DRAW ATTENTION TO SMALL WELL PLACED FEATURES. HER MORAL QUALITIES INCLUDE PURITY, OBEDIENCE, GOOD CHARACTER AND GENEROSITY, MAKING HER A WORTHY REPRESENTATIVE OF HER FAMILY. THIS ANNUAL MASQUERADE IS PERFORMED TO RE-EMPHASISE AND EXAGGERATE ALL OF THESE IDEALS.