Finch & Co



TWO PAPUAN NEW GUINEA EAST SEPIK PROVINCE WESTERN PRINCE ALEXANDER MOUNTAINS ABELAM PEOPLES BASKETRY MASKS

TWO PAPUAN NEW GUINEA EAST SEPIK PROVINCE WESTERN PRINCE ALEXANDER MOUNTAINS ABELAM PEOPLES BASKETRY MASKS AND HEADDRESS ORNAMENTS IN THE FORM OF AN ABSTRACT BIRD BRIGHTLY PAINTED WITH RED YELLOW AND WHITE EARTH PIGMENTS

AN OLD PRINTED LABEL ATTACHED TO ONE MASK READING: 'BIRMINGHAM MUSUEM' WITH INK INSCRIBED INVENTORY NO. 64'29 / 5

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

SIZE: 19CM HIGH, 12CM WIDE, 8CM DEEP - 7½ INS HIGH, 4¾ INS WIDE, 3¼ INS DEEP AND 17.5CM HIGH, 10CM WIDE, 7.5CM DEEP - 7 INS HIGH, 4 INS WIDE, 3 INS DEEP

LITERATURE

MADE FROM THE PLAITED STEMS OF A CLIMBING VINE, LYGODIUM, AND COLOURED WITH NATURALLY BRIGHTLY COLOURED EARTH PIGMENTS, THESE MASKS WERE WORN ON THE BACK OF THE HEAD ATTACHED BY MEANS OF A RATTAN SHAFT ON A COMB FIXED IN THE HAIR. THE ABSTRACT BIRD WOULD THEN MOVE ABOUT ENERGETICALLY IN DANCE CEREMONIES PERHAPS AS A REPRESENTATION OF CLAN SPIRITS. TRADITIONALLY ALL NEW GUINEA ART WAS MADE FOR USE IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT SUCH AS INITIATION RITUALS, END OF MOURNING FESTIVALS OR FOR THE CEREMONIAL MEN'S HOUSE. THESE MASKS MAY HAVE BEEN USED IN THE INITIATION OF ADOLESCENT BOYS INTO CULT OF THE MEN'S HOUSE 'HAUS TAMBARAN'.

NEW GUINEA HAS HUNDREDS OF CULTURES IN THE MANY DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS AND ECOSYSTEMS WITHIN ITS BOUNDARIES. LIVING ALONG ITS RIVERS, IN THE MOUNTAINS, TROPICAL RAINFOREST AND ON NUMEROUS ISLANDS THE PEOPLE SPEAK ALMOST 1000 DIFFERENT LANGUAGES. THE SEPIK RIVER MEANDERS WEST TO EAST OVER A LOWLAND COURSE OF SOME 700 MILES EMPTYING INTO THE PACIFIC IN ABOUT THE CENTRE OF THE NORTH COAST. THE ART OF THIS ONE IMMENSE REGION IS LARGELY SCULPTURAL AND CAN BE DIVIDED ROUGHLY INTO TEN STYLISTIC AREAS,

WHICH IN TURN CAN BE BROKEN DOWN INTO STYLISTIC SUBREGIONS. ART WAS CENTRAL TO RITUAL LIFE AND WAS CENTRED AROUND THE MEN'S HOUSE AND THE ELABORATE INITIATIONS AND CEREMONIES ASSOCIATED WITH IT.