Finch & Co



AN UNUSUAL 'NŌ' MASK

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WOOD, BLACK LACQUER, GILDING

SIGNED: UMAN AND KAKIHAN

JAPAN

19TH CENTURY

SIZE: 21CM HIGH, 16CM WIDE - 8¼ INS HIGH, 6¼ INS WIDE

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LITERATURE

THE BEAUTIFULLY EXECUTED WOOD MASK IS PROBABLY FROM THE WORKSHOP OF DEME UMAN; ALTHOUGH HE IS WELL KNOWN AS A NŌ MASK CARVER, HIS SIGNATURE ALSO APPEARS ON EXAMPLES FROM THE SAME WORKSHOP. ONE CAN ONLY PRESUME THE MASTER, DEME UMAN, ALLOWED PRODUCTION UNDER HIS SUPERVISION AND BY APPRENTICES WHOSE WORK WAS CONSIDERED OF A HIGH QUALITY IF NOT AS GOOD AS THE MASTER, TO CARRY HIS SIGNATURE ONCE THE MASK LEFT THE WORKSHOP.

THE LACQUER AND SHAPE OF THE MASK BEAR A VERY ELEGANT FORM HEIGHTENED BY THE SMALL AMOUNT OF 'GILT' TO THE TEETH.

THE ELABORATE JAPANESE NŌ DANCE-DRAMA DEVELOPED IN THE 14TH CENTURY FROM A NUMBER OF EARLIER FORMS AND HAS RETAINED ITS POPULARITY. THE BOLDLY DYNAMIC, GROTESQUE OR SUBTLY ELOQUENT DANCE MASKS ARE WORN BY THE PRINCIPAL PERFORMERS TO EVERY CONCEIVABLE MOOD OR EMOTION. AS NŌ MASKS ARE WORN FOR A LONG TIME THROUGHOUT THE COMPLEX PLOT THEY ARE CARVED FROM A LIGHTER WOOD THAN MANY OF THE EARLIER FORMS. AT FIRST THEIR MANUFACTURE WAS A SIDE LINE OF THE TEMPLE SHRINE IMAGE MAKERS, BUT THE CRAFT EVENTUALLY BECAME THE SPECIALISED TRADE OF CERTAIN FAMILIES, SOME OF WHOM CLAIMED THEIR WORK WAS 'TENKA ICHI' 'UNSURPASSED UNDER HEAVEN'.