Finch & Co



A RARE ANTHROPOMORPHIC TSONGA HEADREST

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AN OLD PAPER LABEL: 'AFRICAN PILLOW BT. WEBSTER. SEP 1897. P.'

FINE COLOUR AND PATINA THROUGH USE

WOOD, PIGMENT, PAPER LABEL

ZIMBABWE

19TH CENTURY

SIZE: 11.5CM HIGH, 15CM WIDE - 4½ HIGH, 6 INS WIDE

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LITERATURE

ANCESTRAL SPIRITS WERE BELIEVED TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEIR LIVING DESCENDANTS THROUGH DREAMS AND THUS THE 'SUPPORT OF DREAMS' (FALGAYRETTES 1989), THE HEADREST, MANIFESTED THIS INTERDEPENDENCE IN A MATERIAL FORM. HEADRESTS WERE OFTEN GIFTS TAKEN BY A BRIDE TO HER NEW HOME WHEN SHE MARRIED AND THIS CUSTOM SYMBOLICALLY LINKED HER ANCESTORS WITH HER HUSBANDS.

WOOD CARVING WAS AN EXCLUSIVELY MALE OCCUPATION AND HEADRESTS PROVIDED GREAT SCOPE FOR THE SKILL OF A CARVER TO ELABORATE ON VARIOUS LOCAL STYLES. REPRESENTATIONAL ANIMAL FIGURES, MOSTLY ANTELOPE AND CATTLE, APPEAR VERY RARELY IN THE ART OF SOUTH AFRICAN HEADRESTS. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THEIR APPEAL TO WESTERN AESTHETIC SENSIBILITIES THEY APPEAR IN MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS IN NUMBERS THAT OUTWEIGH ANY PROPERLY BALANCED SELECTION.

PROVENANCE

EX PITT RIVERS MUSEUM COLLECTION, INVENTORY NUMBER: '1342'

EX WEBSTER COLLECTION, 1897

GALERIE MONBRISON, PARIS, FRANCE, 2012

EX PRIVATE COLLECTION

LITERATURE: ILLUSTRATED IN: 'A NATURALIST IN THE TRANSVAAL', W. L. DISTANT; LONDON, 1892, PG. 102, NO. 7 (DESCRIBED AS MAGWAMBA HEAD-REST