



Crest mask representing a male antelope (chi wara)

Medium

Wood

Description

The crest mask is one part of a masquerade costume that consists of a basket (to which the crest mask is secured), cloth bands that hold the basket to the performer's head, and a loose-fitting costume covered with many long, dark fibers. Those persons who perform the Ci Wara masquerade are not called dancers, but "wearers of fibers." Traditionally, the Ci Wara masquerade was part of an initiation society of the same name. Whereas most African initiation societies are secretive and forbid women's participation, Ci Wara performances encouraged female participation. Women took part in the music, viewed the masquerade, and ate at the celebratory meal. The Ci Wara masquerade praised agricultural work as well as the complimentary nature of the sexes. Successful

farming wed the sun (male) with the earth and water (female). Today, more modern agricultural techniques have supplanted traditional farming methods and their attendant ceremonies. Ci Wara objects and practices have largely lost their religious significance due to the progression of Islam and the crest masks are now performed in a much more limited way. They celebrate community age-grades and professional dance troupes perform Ci Wara masquerades in Mali and abroad. The Ci Wara is a divine being - half mortal, half animal - who taught the Bamana people how to cultivate crops. Its name may be translated literally: ci- means "to cultivate" and wara, "beast." The Bamana, an ethnolinguistic group of the upper Niger region of Mali, cannot be easily distinguished from their neighbors such as the Mande or Fula who have adopted Bamana language and culture. Formerly called "Bambara," a pejorative name assigned to Bamana people by outside informants, the Bamana distinguish themselves from their neighbors in religious terms. Bamana people observe the religious practices of their ancestors; they have not converted to Islam. Bamana crest mask styles differ considerably and reflect regional preferences. With strong vertical lines and an elaborate mane, Ci Wara made in the Ségou region of Mali resemble the roan antelope. Performers of the Ci Wara strive to imitate the movements of an antelope - their gate, their cautious gaze into the distance, and their occasional leaps into the air to check for predators. Just as farmers necessarily bend over the soil when planting and cultivating their crops, the Ci Wara head pulls down in a tight curve. In masquerade, the performer leans forward and supports his weight on short canes.

This posture represents the need for farmers to continually tend their fields. The spectacularly long and straight horns reference abundant millet stalks, a staple grain in Mali. Prominent genitals mark this Ci Wara mask as male. Its mate, a female Ci Wara, would have featured a young antelope on her back. African women often carry their babies on their backs, thereby freeing the mothers' hands for other work. Ci Waraw (plural of Ci Wara) always appear in pairs and it is forbidden to separate the couple in performance. Anyone doing so could experience great physical pain. _____ Tyi Wara-Bamana ceremonial dance. Wooden antelopes are carved and attached to basketry caps. They are carved in many styles, from abstract to naturalistic. The masks also recall the mythical being, Tyi Wara, who taught mankind the secret of agriculture.

Dimensions

47 1/4 x 4 5/8 x 13 3/4 inches (120 x 11.8 x 34.9 cm)