

Basic Detail Report



Female mask

Date

ca. 1900-1940

Medium

Wood

Description

Female mask Western Grassfields (Cameroon) 73.25.4
Wood mask with large nose, exposed teeth, and saw-toothed coiffure. This female helmet mask would have been danced in a masquerade along with other human and animal masks. Together, these masks form a group controlled by either an important lineage or a regulatory society called the Kwifoyn. The group of masks was likely produced by a single artist and danced as on a single occasion, such as a funeral. The masquerade follows a loose structure in which a male leader mask is followed by female masks, and other male and animal masks. Ideally, the masquerade concludes with a second leader mask,

such as the powerful elephant mask. It is not easy to distinguish between male and female masks of the Western Grassfields; both types have bulbous eyes, large noses, and exposed teeth. However, most female masks feature a smaller, tight coiffure, in contrast to the distinctive caps or large, more elaborate structured headdresses on male masks. Although a helmet mask usually encases the head of the masquerade dancer, helmet masks of the Western Grassfields do not have eyeholes and are therefore worn tilted back on the dancer's head. Suggested readings: Tamara Northern, *The Art of Cameroon*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1984; and Tamara Northern, *Expressions of Cameroon Art: The Franklin Collection*. S.I.: Rembrandt Press, 1986.

Dimensions

12 × 9 × 11 inches (30.5 × 22.9 × 28 cm)