

Basic Detail Report



Okoroshi mask

Medium

Wood with red, black, and white pigments

Description

Face mask with carved teeth, plaited coiffure, and red, black, and white pigments. Igbo peoples traditionally perform this mask at the onset of the rainy season. Because this season is associated with both human and agricultural productivity, the masquerade features male and female characters. Igbo men perform both male and female roles, though younger men tend to dance the male characters; the cumbersome male masks require more physical strength to perform and the male characters call for more obnoxious behavior - a suitable role for young men. The Okoroshi masquerade consists of many masks

that fall into one of two categories that can be broadly termed "beauty" and "beast." Symmetrical, light, and delicate masks such as the one seen here are understood to be benign. These bright, female masks are associated with white clouds and thus danced on sunny days. By contrast, dark, asymmetrical - even ugly - masks may be performed on any day due to their aggressive or dominant nature. The white pigment applied to the female masks does not signify race; light-skinned Igbo women are not considered to be inherently more beautiful than those with darker skin. Much about this Okoroshi mask would be understood to be beautiful and civilized: a symmetrical face, high eyebrows, straight teeth, and a neat coiffure. The small round designs in front of the ears represent body stamps. Igbo women embellish their bodies with stamped patterns created by dipping a carved wood stamp into natural pigment. These designs may have had special significance at one time, but have long since lost any particular meaning. The complete masquerade costume that accompanies this mask consists entirely of white clothing: cape, shirt, short trousers and socks. Tied to his waist, the Okoroshi masker wears several large bells. These function as the Okoroshi's "voice." The masker may only hum along with the clanging bells; he may never speak. Suggested reading: Herbert M. Cole and Chike C. Aniakor, *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos*. Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, UCLA, 1984.

Dimensions

9 1/8 x 6 inches (23.2 x 15.2 cm)