



Mask (Deangle)

Medium

Wood, metal, cloth, cowrie shells, mirrors, and hair

Description

Wood face mask with inset metal teeth and eye rims, heavy forehead, tall crown projection, and attached cloth, cowrie shells, mirrors and hair. Dan people believe that an essential force called *dü* is present in all parts of the world - in all animate and inanimate objects. *Dü* is particularly manifest in spirits who reside in the mountains and rely on humans to create masquerades so that the spirits may take corporeal form. Unlike many other African masquerades, the mask does not lose its spirit if damaged; nevertheless, the spirit may choose to abandon the mask, essentially leaving it dead. Finally, a mask spirit has little allegiance to its owner. If looted in war, the mask will transfer its power to the victor after appearing in a new owner's dream. Masks generally feature physical

characteristics of either sex: female elements include elliptical eyes and an oval shape, whereas male facial qualities include a more angular eye and face shape, and a large overall size. Despite these gendered differences, masks are not believed to be male or female, but understood as *pa*, or "things." The exposed teeth of the deangle mask are not meant to suggest fearsomeness. Instead, it smiles, exposing teeth with large gaps considered aesthetically desirable among the Dan. The deangle is a friendly joking or laughing masquerade performed at the time of circumcision camp. It does not perform to music, but moves gracefully between the camp and women back at the village from whom the deangle solicits provisions for the men and boys away from home. Good-natured, but amusingly ignorant, the deangle sometimes teases the women by asking for inedible goods. The conical extension that rises above the forehead of the mask is called a *ke son*, named after the fish trap which it resembles. The heavy cloak is constructed from locally made fabric, dyed blue with indigo, a plant found throughout West Africa. When performed, a long, heavy grass skirt completes the deangle costume. Suggested reading: Eberhard Fischer and Hans Himmelheber, *The Arts of the Dan in West Africa*. Zurich: Museum Rietberg, 1984.

Dimensions

Height: 36 inches (91.4 cm)