



THREE IMPORTANT MASKS

from
D^R ALEX RAFAELI
COLLECTION

didier
CLAES



D^r ALEX RAFAELI
Riga 1910 – Jérusalem 1996

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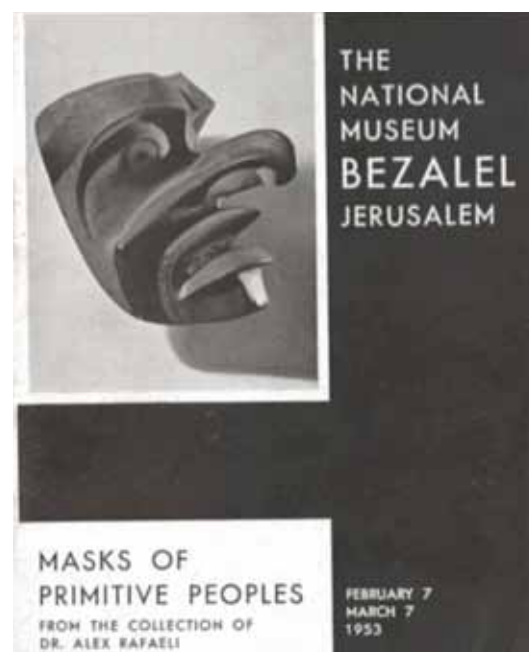
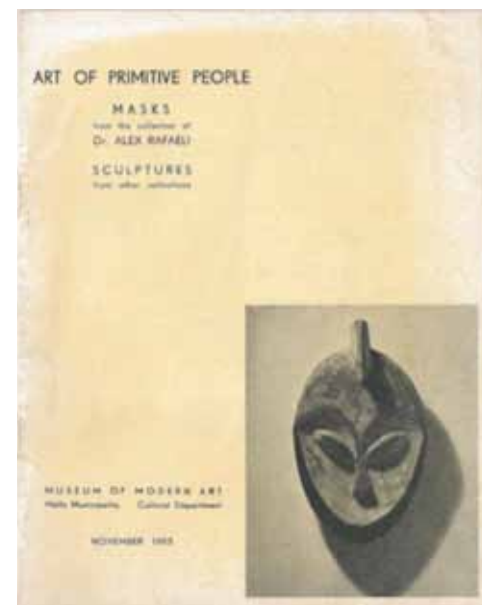
The african masks collection of D^r Alex Rafaeli

Alex Rafaeli's was an uncommon life. Born in Riga in 1910, the child then known as Sasha lived through the last years of the Russian Empire and the Revolution of 1917. The son of Communist parents, he was a witness to pogroms, and in adolescence was already convinced of the need for a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Alex Rafaeli travelled to Jerusalem for the first time in 1933 and settled there in 1954. Between these two dates, he earned a doctorate in political science at Heidelberg University and travelled extensively. The rise of anti-Semitism hardened his militant stance within the Zionist movement, and he was especially active in this organisation during World War II. He arrived in the United States in 1940, joined the U.S. Army in 1943 and took part in the Normandy landings. Besides his excellent French, this is Rafaeli's only known connection with France.

In her testimony *Alex Rafaeli - A Eulogy* (Colloquium, June 17 2007, Weyman Institute, New York), his wife Esther Rafaeli noted that only after they had settled in Israel did he have the time to busy himself with and expand his collection of African masks: "He had time to develop his interest in art and to expand our collection of paintings and African masks."

This led to several exhibitions of his African collection, first in 1953 at the National Museum Bezalel in Jerusalem (also shown in Tel Aviv), then in 1955 at the Haifa Museum of Modern Art.



The three masks we are exhibiting were included in the first of these exhibitions and are probably among Alex Rafaeli's earliest acquisitions, made before 1939. This theory is corroborated in one instance by the mention "Former Collection of Paul Guillaume" in the catalogue record. Guillaume was a famous Parisian art dealer whose career began in 1911 and who played a pioneering role in the dissemination and development of an aesthetic of African art in the West; and who did indeed sell part of his collection in 1930.¹

¹ Pierre Lazareff, "Paul Guillaume, qui lança l'art nègre en France, va vendre sa fameuse collection" (Paul Guillaume, who launched Negro art in France, to sell his famous collection), *Paris-Midi*, 14 October 1930. Quoted in Solveig Pigearias and Michèle Hornn, "Paul Guillaume and African Art", *Tribal Art*, No. 59, Spring 2011, pp. 78-91.



Modigliani, Amedeo (1884-1920)
Portrait of Paul Guillaume Seated, 1916
Milan, Museo dell'ottocento
© 2015. Photo Scala, Florence

Paul Guillaume (1891-1934) was dealer to Soutine, Modigliani, Derain, Picasso, Matisse and Van Dongen, as well as one of the pioneers of the discovery of African art in the West. The chief dates of this aspect of his career are ¹ :

- **1904** discovers an African statue on the premises of a Montmartre laundress.
- **1911** meets poet Guillaume Apollinaire, who introduces him to art dealer Joseph Brummer.
- **1912** foundation of the *Société d'art et d'archéologie nègre* (Society for Negro Art and Archaeology), of which Paul Guillaume is the representative.
- **1913** becomes a founding member of the *Société des mélanophiles* (Society of Melanophiles).
- **1914** opens his gallery at 6 Rue de Miromesnil in Paris and becomes editor-in-chief of the magazine *Les soirées de Paris*; *Statuary in Wood by African Savages* – *The Root of Modern Art* exhibition at the Stieglitz Gallery in New York, to which he loans 14 items.
- **1915** begins cooperation with Marius de Zayas' Modern Gallery in New York.
- **1916** exhibition of African sculptures from his collection and paintings by Modigliani.
- **1917** loans a Baule item to the first Dadaist exhibition organised at Galerie Coray (Switzerland) and opens his new gallery at 108 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré (Paris).
- **1918** foundation of *Les Arts à Paris* magazine.
- **1919** organises *First Exhibition of Negro and Oceanian Art* at Galerie Devambez (Paris).
- **1919** 10 June, organises famous *Fête nègre* event at Comédie des Champs-Élysées theatre (Paris).
- **1922** meets with Dr Albert Barnes of Philadelphia.
- **1923** exhibition of new Barnes Foundation acquisitions at his gallery in Paris.
- **1926** publication of *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, co-authored with Thomas Munro.
- **1929** exhibits his collection at Galerie Bernheim Jeune and publication of French translation of his book, *La Sculpture nègre primitive*.
- **1930** announces sale of part of his African art collection.
- **1933** exhibits African works from his collection at the Derain exhibition at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in New York and the Chicago Arts Club.
- **1934** Paul Guillaume dies on October 1.
- **1935** *African Negro Art* exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art, which posthumously includes 50 items from his collection.

¹ This selection of key dates was established using the article by Solveig Pigearias and Michèle Hornn: "Paul Guillaume and African Art", *Tribal Art*, No. 59, Spring 2011, pp. 78-91.

A famous style from the Ivory Coast

This Guro mask from the collection of French art dealer Paul Guillaume (1891-1934) is probably the work of the “Master of Bouaflé” (or of his workshop), whose distinctive style was first described by Eberhard Fischer and Lorenz Homberger (*Die Kunst der Guro*, Rietberg Museum, 1985).

The deep zigzag hairline pattern, the bulging forehead, the eyes delineated with two slanting cuts highlighted by the eyebrows, the narrow-bridged, pointed, slightly ret-roussé nose and small hint of a mouth are consistent with the characteristics described by both researchers. The thick plait also frequently occurs in the production of the artist, who liked to crown his statues with heavy hairstyles or crest figures.

Paul Guillaume is closely linked with the Master of Bouaflé, as he sold several masks in this style between 1920 and 1930 (see images below). In particular, he sold one to the Rietberg Museum in Zurich (Inv. RAF 466) and another to the Barnes Foundation of Philadelphia (Inv. A 106). Finally, a mask from his collection, the location of which is currently unknown, was reproduced in 1930 in a book by A. Portier and F. Poncetton, *Les Arts sauvages – Afrique*, in which it was referred to as Zénouela, a nebulous term which requires an elucidation of the colonial context of the times.

Guro mask
Côte d'Ivoire
Wood, pigments
H 49 cm

Paul Guillaume Collection, Paris
Alex Rafaeli Collection, Jerusalem

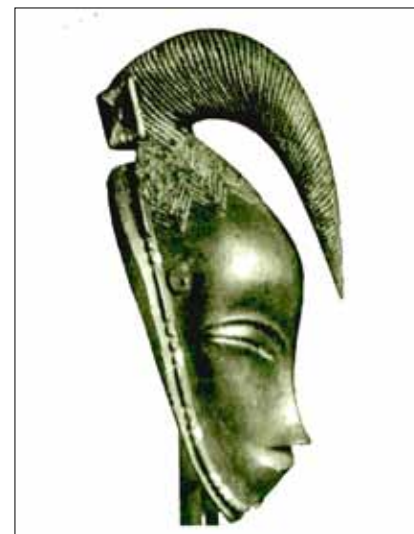
Publications
Masks of Primitive Peoples from the collection of Dr. Alex Rafaeli, exhibition catalogue, Jerusalem, The National Museum Bezalel, 1953, No.6
&
Art of Primitive People. Masks from the collection of Dr. Alex Rafaeli – Sculptures from other collections, exhibition catalogue, Haifa, Museum of Modern Art, Haifa Municipality, Cultural Department, 1955, No. 7



Gu mask, Master of Buafle
Guro, Côte d'Ivoire
wood, pigments - 32.4 cm / Inv. A 106
image © 2014 The Barnes Foundation Philadelphia



Gu mask, Master of Buafle
Guro, Côte d'Ivoire - wood - 36 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, inv. RAF 466
© Rainer Wolfsberger



Zénouela Dance Mask, Paul Guillaume
A. Portier and F. Poncetton, III. XXXII

The relevance of an ancient master from the Ivory Coast, active at the turn of the 20th century

The recent discovery (or rediscovery) of hitherto unknown Guro masks is undoubtedly linked to the famous travelling exhibition “African Masters – Art of the Ivory Coast”¹.

This exhibition includes various types of sculptures, both antique and contemporary, the stylistic unity of which enables them to be traced to a Master or workshop. One section is dedicated to the Master of Bouaflé.

This new exhibition of Ivory Coast art confirms the long-standing attention for such items, the provenance, history and selection of

which sheds considerable light on their major role in the formation of European taste in the early 20th century (viz. the collections of Félix Fénéon, Paul Guillaume, Charles Ratton, etc.). In this respect, Guro sculpture – especially its masks – constitutes one of the most revealing instances.

¹ This exhibition was produced by the Rietberg Museum and will travel in Switzerland and the Netherlands, prior to a final show at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris in July 2015.



The reception of Guro art in the Early 20th Century

Prior to being associated with the conventional name of the Master of Bouaflé (in reference to an administrative subsection of Côte d'Ivoire), and even before they were considered to be Guro, the first pieces in this distinctive style were shown under the name "Zouénola Mask" (in the 1929 work *Primitive Negro Sculpture* by Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro), "Zénouela Dance Mask" (*Les Arts sauvages* by A. Portier et F. Poncetton, 1930, see illustration above), or "Zuénolé mask" (in Nancy Cunard's 1934 *Negro Anthology* concerning a mask from the Charles Ratton collection, see illustration below).



ZUÉNOLÉ Mask from the Charles Ratton Collection
Reproduced in Nancy Cunard, *Negro Anthology* 1931-1934, p. 663.

In his very complete historical study, Bertrand Goy (Tajan, 2014) reminds the reader of the late, uncertain and circumstantial creation of a regional socio-cultural "Guro" entity by the French colonial administration¹, which explains the use of other terms to describe works which today would receive that appellation.

The author emphasises that the terms then used referred to the locality of Zuénoula (in the Guro language: Zuénou-fla), and suggests that items from the neighbouring area were gathered in this small town, which was also home to a major military station, prior to being sent to France. Paul Guillaume would have acquiesced all the more willingly in the use of this name as he was probably – at least in part – responsible for this intense collecting *via* his first commercial network of rubber merchants and targeted advertisements which were published as of 1913 in publications such as *L'Almanach du Marsouin*, which were read by colonial civil servants and the military².

However, it should be noted that these days it is not easy to determine to what exactly this term, which occurs a number of times in early publications, is supposed to refer. The various formulations generate uncertainty as to what it actually designated; was it the locality, the population associated with these items, or a specific style? The Western habit of systematic categorisation, often along confusing lines, and the existence of a complex relationship between the villages and lineages of the Guro of Côte d'Ivoire ((see the study by Ariane Deluz-Chiva, 1965)³, have made this an open question.

Hence, in the view of Africanists, Zuénoula (and its variously spelt avatars) appears above all to be a temporal marker, a name discarded by art history, but which remains evocative of the infatuation of Europeans with the masks of the Ivory Coast in the early 20th century.

- 1 Concerning this matter, Vincent Bouloré notes that "military conquest, especially in the Baule, Yaure and Guro areas, was a bloody process. Entire villages were razed to the ground and clan names disappeared forever after their elites were executed." *in* Dapper 2000, p. 186.
- 2 Paul Guillaume published the advertisements he used to target the colonial population under a pseudonym and as the representative of the *Société d'Art et d'Archéologie Nègre* or *Société des mélanophiles*, both of which he had helped to found.
- 3 According to this author, the use of the suffix "fla", which refers to the concept of a village, could also be used to refer to its inhabitants.

The Master of Bouaflé

The choice of "Bouaflé" to designate the identity of the master sculptor was therefore not a particularly obvious one. The recent study by Bernard de Grunne (2014) reveals the conventional reasons which in 1985 determined Eberhard Fischer and Lorenz Homberger to use the name: "While engaged in field research, Homberger and Fischer found a number of anthropomorphic loom pulleys sculpted by this Master."¹

However, this decision by both academics was not neutral and sheds a specific light on the Master's activity. It should be remembered that the two localities, Zuénoula and Bouaflé, are over 40 km from each other and are located in the north and south of the Guro area respectively. Although they are home to a single people, there are major cultural divergences between both areas, especially in the case of masks, the characteristics of which may even be inverted. In a recent paper, Anne-Marie Bouttiaux (2013) supplies an instance of this principle, which may have major consequences for the artefacts discussed here: "The Gyé, which is one of the most respected masks in the north and is considered to be highly sacred, appears only at night, whereas its southern equivalents mainly come out in the daytime"².

Although Gyé is not the only Guro mask to display the features of a beautiful young woman, Gu (probably the most commonly found in Western collections) is less sacred. To link the Master to the southern part of the area is therefore to influence the interpretations which may be made of the importance of the entity associated with these masks and, beyond their aesthetic magnificence, may explain their mass exodus as of the turn of the 20th century.²



Gu mask, Master of Bouaflé
Guro, Côte d'Ivoire
wood - 35.6 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, inv. RAF 510
© Rainer Wolfsberger

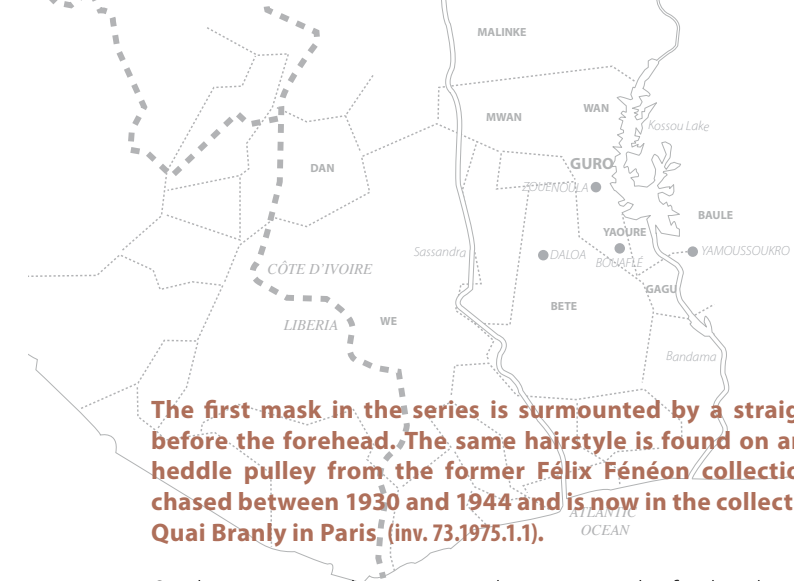
However, the chief factor in the association of the Master with the southern Guro area is style. Bouaflé is set back from the Red Bandama River (which forms a border between the north and south of the area), close to the Yaure area, the influence of which is clearly discernible in his sculptures, in particular in the notched contour of the faces.

The Master of Bouaflé excelled in the depiction of the characteristic features generally associated with the Guro, such as the modelling of the face, the gently curved lines of the high, bulging foreheads and the bridge of the slightly uptilted noses, which he renders to the utmost of aesthetic perfection.

His style is clearly expressed in the slanting treatment of eyes and eyebrows. The gaze, which is rendered by two slits elongated towards the temples, accentuates the face's enigmatic expression. The moue of the tiny mouth also plays a key role in attribution to the Master. The surfaces of the Master of Bouaflé's masks are slightly inlaid with material or buffed to a high sheen.

The Master probably lived between 1880 and 1930 and produced pieces which can be dated to the first quarter of the 20th century.

- 1 The information/alternative mentioned by Vincent Bouloré (Dapper, 2000) suggests that the works may have been collected west of Bouaflé, near Dabouza.
- 2 Anne-Marie Bouttiaux, "Du divertissement au sacrifice. Danses de masque guro de la région de Zuénoula, Côte d'Ivoire" (*From Diversion to Sacrifice. Masked Dances in the Zuénoula Region (Ivory Coast)*) *in* *Dynamics of Masks in West Africa*, Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities, vol. 176, Tervuren, MRAC, 2013, pp. 115-140.
- 3 In another paper, Anne-Marie Bouttiaux (2005) also notes that among the Guro the sacred character of masks does not relate directly to the artefact, but to the altar at which they are worshipped. To discard a mask, therefore, does not cause the spirit of the mask to disappear, as another artefact can be recreated.



The first mask in the series is surmounted by a straight plait projecting before the forehead. The same hairstyle is found on an anthropomorphic heddle pulley from the former Félix Fénéon collection, which was purchased between 1930 and 1944 and is now in the collection of the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris (inv. 73.1975.1.1).

On this specimen, the ornamental scarring on the forehead is rendered by three vertical ridges. This is the number of scars worn by women in the southern part of the Guro area and in Yaure country (whereas men wore four lines). As in the North the reverse was true, this information confirms the putative geographical origin of the item.

Forehead scars, which by the end of the 20th century were worn only by elderly Guro women, are characteristic of Gu masks.

Like all such masks, this piece depicts a young woman who meets the traditional beauty standards of the Guro people: an elongated, harmoniously proportioned, small-chinned face with hair styled in parallel striations above a high forehead, arched eyebrows overlined with black, downcast eyes and a narrow nose with delicate nostrils.

The carved features are inlaid with kaolin (stripes and chevron pattern of hairstyle, lattice pattern of square scarring under the ear), as are the notches outlining the head. The patina is brown and more clearly emphasises the features (hairline, ears, eyes, nose and mouth), while a shiny black surface has been applied to the whole. The surface of the back of the mask, on which traces of the sculptor's tools are visible, is dry and bears two small numbered glued labels, one of which at least refers to the catalogues of the Israeli exhibitions.

Gu was produced with Zamble and Zauli and the same offering altar was used. With the other two masks in the triad, it was brought out to resolve disputes, unmask wizards, or for dances on the occasion of funeral rites and celebrations. All three were sometimes presented as a family in which Zamble was the son, but this interpretation of their relationships was not general and Gu was sometimes said to be Zamble's wife. Gu was always depicted as a beautiful woman whose elaborate coiffure expressed wealth and high rank. However, her performance is neither as feminine nor as graceful as her face, which according to Anne-Marie Bouttiaux (2009) has led to a number of errors of interpretation concerning her apparitions. Indeed, although according to some sources, Gu moves slowly and gracefully to the sound of a solo flute as she sings songs in Zamble's honour, Anne-Marie Bouttiaux noted that her choreography, which was aesthetically uninteresting and required no physical prowess, aroused little interest and was gradually abandoned. The mask was no longer used except when absolutely necessary.

1 GURO mask

Côte d'Ivoire
Wood, pigments
H 49 cm

Paul Guillaume Collection, Paris
Alex Rafaeli Collection, Jerusalem

Publications
Masks of Primitive Peoples from the collection of Dr. Alex Rafaeli, exhibition catalogue, Jerusalem, The National Museum Bezalel, 1953, No. 6 &
Art of Primitive People. Masks from the collection of Dr. Alex Rafaeli – Sculptures from other collections, exhibition catalogue, Haifa, Museum of Modern Art, Haifa Municipality, Cultural Department, 1955, No. 7

THE GURO

Together with the Baule, the Guro are the largest population group in central Côte d'Ivoire and live to the west of Lake Kossou. Linguistically, they belong to the large Mande family and are therefore related to the Dan and Tura of the West, the Wan and Mwan of the North, the Yaure of the East and the Gagu of the South.

The three main centres of the Guro cultural area are Zuénola (North), Daloa (West) and Bouaflé (West).



Heddle pulley, Guro (Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa). Paris, Musée du Quai Branly. Wood: 23 x 6 x 8 cm

Inventory No.: 73.1975.1.1 © 2015 Musée du Quai Branly, photo Claude Germain/Scala, Florence





The second mask is of very different type, probably Yaure if one goes by the jagged line around the face and the three semicircles of the hairstyle, a sign of power and wealth among the Yaure.

The Yaure are closely related to the Guro, with whom they share the same Mande origin. They live in an area of wooded hills with abundant gold deposits north-east of Bouaflé and south-east of Lake Kossou, in central Côte d'Ivoire. This geographical position between the Guro and Baule peoples led to the apparition of reciprocal stylistic influences in their sculpture.

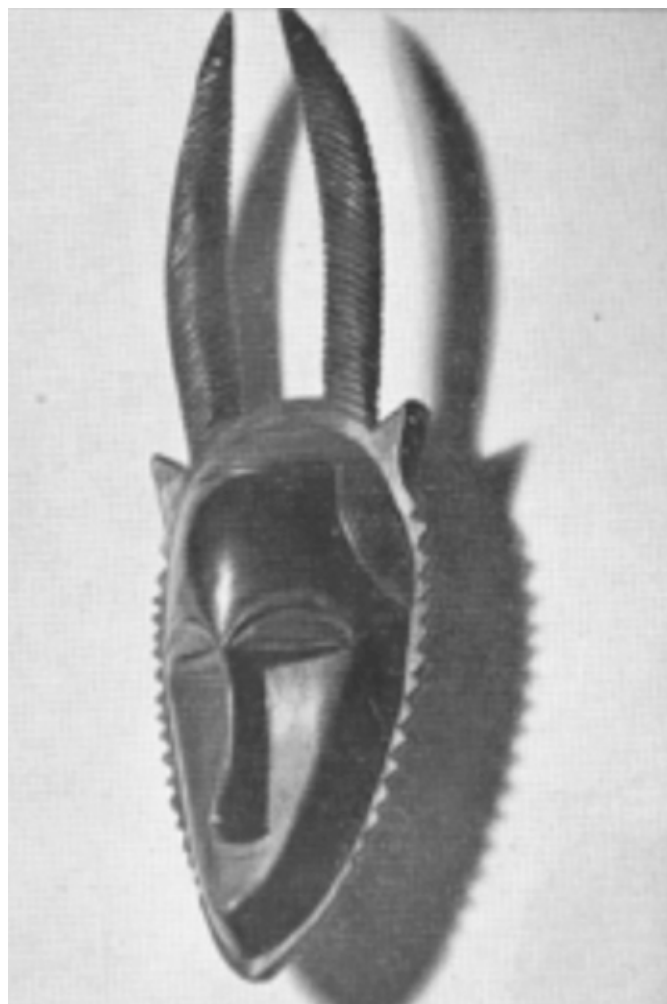
The harmonious form and sophisticated treatment of their ritual masks have spread the renown of Yaure sculptors beyond the boundaries of their small territory.

YAURE mask

Côte d'Ivoire
Wood, pigments
H 49 cm

Rafaeli Collection, Jerusalem

Publications
Masks of Primitive Peoples from the collection of Dr. Alex Rafaeli, exhibition catalogue, Jerusalem, The National Museum Bezalel, 1953, fig. 4 &
Art of Primitive People. Masks from the collection of Dr. Alex Rafaeli – Sculptures from other collections, exhibition catalogue, Haifa, Museum of Modern Art, Haifa Municipality, Cultural Department, 1955, No. 5



The mask in the 1953 catalogue

Yaure masks can usually be identified by the jagged line around the face, the expression of which is peaceful and inward-looking and rendered with half-closed eyes. Concerning this apparent uniformity, Bohumil Holas (1969, p. 134) notes that among the Yaure the mask's expression is of far less importance than the attitudes struck during the dance. The smooth, stylised composition of the masks is frequently offset by a sculpted crest atop the hair, which may depict horns, plaits or an animal figure. In this case, the crest takes the form of two ringed horns directly above two small pointed ears, a zoomorphic addition to a young girl's face. Masks of this type belong to the Dyé group of religious masks (a category also used by the Guro).





KWELE

mask

Gabon
Wood, kaolin
H 31 cm

Alex Rafaeli Collection, Jerusalem

Publications
Masks of Primitive Peoples
from the collection of Dr. Alex Rafaeli,
exhibition catalogue, Jerusalem, The National
Museum Bezalel, 1953, Fig. 28.
&
Art of Primitive People. Masks from
the collection of Dr. Alex Rafaeli – *Sculptures from*
other collections, exhibition catalogue, Haifa,
Museum of Modern Art, Haifa Municipality,
Cultural Department, 1955, cover page.

To a greater or lesser degree, Kwele masks were all connected with the male Beete initiatory group, to which prominent citizens and warriors belonged. Its rites were organised for community occasions (initiations, mourning, etc.) and enabled the group's magical forces to be mobilised to resolve crises and support the village's collective life, especially hunting.

Beete objects, the possession of which was a marker of social and political importance, were kept in a sanctuary cabin used by initiates as a secret meeting-place. Only a small number of masks were actually used for public dances and could be seen by women, in particular *pipibudzè* anthropomorphic masks (i.e. "man" or "boy" masks according to Aristide Courtois, Musée de l'Homme documentation, Paris).¹

This *pipibudzè*-type Kwele face mask was probably brought back from French Congo in the first quarter of the 20th century. The very classic heart-shaped face is surmounted by a small crest. The positioning of the eyes, which slant outwards toward the temples, is noteworthy (the reverse of the famous exemplar owned by Tristan Tzara, now in the Barbier-Muller Museum in Geneva). Another distinguishing feature is the stippling on the eyebrows and nose.

Except for the black line surrounding the face, the mask is coated with kaolin, the layer around the hollows of the eyes and nose being particularly thick. At the back of the mask, which is typical of antique pieces, is a broad edge into which two holes have been drilled for hanging purposes.

With its well-balanced oval frame in which the stylised heart-shaped face is set, this *pipibudzè* mask is a high-quality sculpture which perfectly illustrates the craftsmanship and otherworldly inspiration of the Kwele artists of old.

¹ Information taken from Louis Perrois, unpublished study, 2011



The mask in the 1953 catalogue



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