



Face Mask (Idiok Ekpo)

Date

not dated

Primary Maker

Ibibio people

Medium

wood, pigment and encrustation

Description

The Ekpo festival takes place during the harvest season and reinforces social values. Black masks, idiok ekpo, with deformed faces, wearing black raffia costumes, and carrying threatening weapons or sticks represent souls of the dead who have been condemned by their evil or unfortunate lives to wander forever in the dark, in the shadows of this world and can never enter the underworld where good souls live. The appearance of idiok ekpo is preceded by a group of masks, mfon ekpo (beautiful masks), that represent, by their calm, graceful manner and pale, regular features, souls of good people who have lived respected, positive lives and have died at home among their family and accompanied by the proper rituals. These souls may go abroad in daylight, hence their

pale color. They appear at the market place and elsewhere among the people in the village participating in normal, beneficial social activities. Once the evil souls, idiok ekpo, appear the beautiful masks leave, abandoning the village to the disruptive, destructive activities of the dark masks. The physical deformities and ugliness of the dark masks is testimony to the antisocial activities or unfortunate previous lives of these souls. There is a direct correlation between physical appearance and moral and ethical concepts not just among the Ibibio but also in much of the rest of Africa. It is not surprising that Ibibio village leaders use these dark masks to enforce sanctions against undesirable behavior.

Dimensions

Overall: 20 5/8 x 10 1/2 x 7 1/4 in. (52.4 x 26.7 x 18.4 cm)