



TATANUA ex BRETSCHNEIDER

A very fine tatanua mask. The strongly carved wood face is beautifully painted with the typical three-color motifs used in the malagan rituals. The eyes are highlighted with carefully chosen shell opercula of the turbo marmoratus to create a piercing gaze. The volume of the head-dress is unusually full and well balanced with a large central "a mulai" crest representing the hair-do worn by young men during the mourning period highlighted by the two white lime plastered panels to either side. The true tatanua, or soul, leaves the body at death and only returns to inhabit the mask at the time of the ceremony, which involves very long and complicated preparations, as well as physical and mental deprivations by the future wearer of the mask. These dances which are an integral part of the malagan funerary ceremonies are intense religious moments and great care is taken to ensure that no "bad-magic" caused by unhappy or jealous descendants intervenes to cause harm.

New Ireland, Bismarck Archipelago, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia. Wood, coconut husk, fiber, shell, lime, and trade-yarn. 40 x 15 x 33,5. 19/20th century. The normally pierced earlobes to both sides are missing (old damage).

According to Richard Parkinson (1907), these masks that danced at Malagan funeral ceremonies, represented the soul of a deceased. They brought together all the attributes of masculine and virile beauty : a wide headdress, a prominent nose, pierced lobes and a large mouth with a healthy teeth.

Tatanua masks are worn by ceremonial dancers and are often a part of New Ireland Malagan rituals.

These are funerary religious ceremonies held by the family of the deceased to communicate with deities and to show respect for the deceased. Mannequins or statues representing the soul of the deceased are also shown at the malagan ceremonies. The local people construct them so that they celebrate the dead person's characteristics. They are elaborated with anthropomorphic symbols which are thought to represent the link between the people of New Ireland, their creation and the spiritual world to which they eventually pass on. The dances were performed in groups ; only those who were respected would be allowed the honour of performing the dance, as it was important that observers see the community's strength.

The carved masks may take many months to construct, so that the person's death may not be formally marked for some time. The celebrations would be used as a time for the community to illustrate its skills to its neighbours as well as to meet, agree and perform the cultural aspect of a community member dying.