



GALERIE MEYER  
OCEANIC & ESKIMO ART



### Large Yipwon

A large yipwon, or hook-figure. The yipwon represent great spirits that are specifically related to hunting and warfare. The large yipwon are main entities in the local pantheon gravitating around the central figure, or yimar – A naturalistic anthropomorphic sculpture. These yipwon are usually stored at the rear of the Mens House on a raised platform or altar.

The present yipwon is of high sculptural quality – the bearded head is large and finely carved with a strong nose with pierced septum over protruding lips and tongue. The eyes were once inlaid with shell. The large checks show what remains of the facial part that adorned the figure just before it was

collected in the field by a European. The ears are pierced. It is quite unusual and rare to have a second stylized humanoid head in the center of the ribcage. The head here is upside-down and of smaller size almost as if it represented an unborn child.

Yimar People, Korewori River, Mid Korewori River, South bank of the Middle Sepik River, PNG, Melanesia. Hard wood with traces of pigment with a patina of age and wear (period restoration to the top and bottom hook points, the leg is missing). 151 x x 7 x 16 cm. 19/20th century.

The remarkable anthropomorphic form of the yipwon, which is created to be seen more in profile than from head-on is the result of a systematic stylization and reduction process. It shows the ancestor with a large head bent slightly forward imparting a tension and menace that is remarkably powerful and awe inspiring. The body is emaciated until only the back-bone and rib-cage remains surrounding on a vertical plane the central "heart". The figure balances on a single flexed leg (here missing) as if ready to spring forward into action.

Prior to hunting or warring expeditions, the power and threatening yipwon were "heated", or given life, with magical incantations and painted. Blood and secret concoctions were splashed on the figure as well. Returning after a successful headhunting expedition or battle, the victorious warriors would attach bits of the enemy's body to the hooks and sometimes the whole figure would be painted with the blood of the victims. In some cases, it is reported that the heads of the enemy would be stuck onto the figures hooks as well. The hooks represent the beak of the great hornbill, a bird related to the world of the deceased and the spirits.

#### **Literature:**

Haberland, Eike: CAVES OF THE KARAWARI. D'Arcy Galleries, New York, 1968, N° 57.

Kaufmann, Christian : KOREWORI. Magische Kunst aus dem Regenwald. Museum der Kulturen, Basel & Christoph Merian Verlag, 2003, fig 44, PP 38 & 96.

Meyer, Anthony JP: OCEANIC ART / OZEANISCHE KUNST / ART OCEANIEN. Könemann Verlag, Köln. 1995 for another example in the Clyne collection