



Very Large GOBAELA
GOBAELA

Grass Island, Calvados Chain, Louisiade Archipelago, Massim Area, PNG, Melanesia

Wood, pigments blue, orange, and white lime, shells and red plastic

On the back is engraved the inscription "Mumuga" and the date "1953".

69 x 50 x 2 cm max.

Late 19th or early 20th century

A very large wooden wealth presentation object or gobaela with a wide crescent moon-shaped crest that reveals two stylized bird heads at the extremities. On either side of the object, between the top of the handle and the base of the crescent, two avian heads are shown in profile. The upper edge of the object is pierced; it originally housed mbwagi-type disks of red shell which here were later replaced with red plastic insulation tubing from electrical wires. The gobaela functions as a wealth presentation scepter for mbwagi (shell money discs made from red Spondylus shell). The form of the gobaela represents several essential images: when shown with the handle pointing downward it can be seen as the representation of a stylized human figure, ovaries or male genitals. When viewed with the handle upright it represents the single-masted mythical canoe which brought the people from their ancestral lands to their present home as well as an erect phallus. This one of the largest examples recorded along with one other also collected by Beran and Meyer in 1987, which went into the collection of Harry Beran

(see the attached photo of Dr. Harry Beran on Grass island discussing the other large example we collected and which went into Beran's collection. Photo : AJP Meyer). The name "Mumuga" and the date "1953" carved into the object relate to past local ownership.