



Singarin Spirit Figure

These enigmatic figures are said to portray powerful spirits and not ancestors. Very little is known in relation to their function and representation. It is reported that in the pre-colonial period (before 1884)

they were used as dance ornaments worn during initiations and other ceremonies attached to a bamboo framework or structure that was either carried in the hands of the dancer or attached to his back with the figure rising above the dancer's head (a small number of these figures still have the bamboo attachments).

These figures, which represent a metamorphosis of half-man and half-animal are conceived in a most unusual manner often without the torso or backbone. The legs, arms and head are attached together via the frontal, vertical spur which descends from the elongated beak-like nose. The long, emaciated, and often twisting body usually terminates with a zoomorphic representation projecting downward under the feet, in the present case there is a crested bird with a curved beak - possibly a cassowary or a stylized rooster. In some cases, the vertical frontal support represents a highly stylized crocodile (see Gal. Meyer TEFAF 2009). When in use the figures are painted and festooned with extensive decorative fiber, vegetal and feathered ornaments.

Singarin Village, Kopar language group, Lower Sepik River, PNG, Melanesia. Wood with extensive remains of pigments and a fine, aged patina of wear and use, with some scorching to the lower right side. Carved with neolithic tools.

70 cm.

Early to mid-19th century (pre-colonial period).

A painted inscription on the rear indicates in German « Dorf Singarin » or Singarin village, probable place where it was first acquired from a Papuan owner.

Literature:

See other examples in the collection of Mr. & Mrs. Simonis, Germany and acquired from Loed van Bussel (ex St. Paul Mission Wengerohr/Wittlich) N° L.1/3 Neu-Guinea; N°1978.412.722 formerly in the Wolfgang Paalen collection now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art New York and two others N° 71.1962.1.20 and 71.1961.103.322 collected on the La Korrigane expedition between 1934 & 1936 one of which is described as “named Loran or known as a loran figure...representing a spirit and used during initiation ceremonies”; and one offered by Galerie Meyer at TEFAF 2009 from the collection of Rektor Ehmer, Ethnologisch-naturkundliche Sammlung im Missionshaus Sankt Paul, Wengerohr/Wittlich, Germany circa 1922.

Ulitamano is the vernacular name used by Kevin Conru in his book Sepik Ramu Art of 2019. The Korrigane expedition reports Loran as the name, or identifier, from the village of Magendo (Magondo) situated to the West of Angoram Village.

Ref. : Conru, Kevin (ed.) : Sepik Ramu Art. Conru Editions, Bruxelles, 2019