
Museography

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Department of Anthropology
California State University Sacramento

Makonde Mask, Vampire

by Meghan Farley, Curatorial Assistant

Donor/Collector: Daniel J. Crowley
Collection Date: 1960, Dar-es-Salaam Indian Shop
H 28" x W 21" x D19"



This painted helmet mask comes from the Makonde of Tanzania, who live along the Ruvuma River. While the Makonde of Mozambique and Tanzania are culturally distinct, both are prolific producers of art, including sculpture and masks.¹ The masks, known as *mapiko*, are used in initiation rites, in which the ancestral spirits return wearing these masks.² The dancers in these rites wear the *mapiko* over the head, tilted, so that the dancer can see out of the mouth of the mask and masquerade as a deceased person's ancestral spirit, or *Lihoka*.³ The objective during these rites, today carried out during village festivals, is to convince the uninitiated, namely women and children, that the dancer is truly a *Lihoka*.⁴ Only initiated men have access to *mapiko*.

Makonde masks, therefore, are made to be worn by men. Carvers seek a balance of elements, dramatic enough for the ritual dance, but with an eye for aesthetics.⁵ Typically, they are anthropomorphic

in form, although it is not uncommon to see masks that represent animals.⁶ This helmet mask (one of 19 in the permanent collection of the Anthropology Museum) follows these generalities. However, unlike many Makonde helmet masks, the vampire mask does not boast stylized scarification marks. These marks are generally seen on *mapiko* of human forms and are created through applying wax or incising marks into the wood. In addition to scarification marks, *mapiko* typically feature human hair at the crown of the head; this vampire *mapiko* is no exception. However, it is not uncommon to find *mapiko* from the post-colonial period that incorporate stylized marks in the wood instead of human hair.⁷

Given the Makonde's propensity for creating contemporary masks and sculpture for the commercial market that reference traditional forms, it is not surprising that some criticize Makonde art as "inauthentic." This critique is unwarranted, as the Makonde have been producing art for patrons for over a century. The first patrons included Portuguese colonial administrators, Indian shopkeepers, and Dutch Catholic missionaries.⁸ Today, much of this art is made for tourists, however these artistic forms stem from the custom of producing traditional masks and sculptures related to Makonde spirituality. Carvers constantly find new means of expressing themselves and their traditions, thereby linking the past with the present. The contemporary Makonde mask is both a window onto the tribal past and a reflection of modern life, the latter of which includes a livelihood tied to the production of "tourist art."

Endnotes

1. Robbins and Nooter (2004:515); 2. Duarte (1996:16); 3. West and Sharpes (2002:34); 4. Duarte (1996:14, 16), West and Sharpes (2002:34); 5. Duarte (1996:12); 6. Duarte (1996:10); 7. West and Sharpes (2002:35); 8. West and Sharpes (2002:34).

References Cited

► Duarte, Ricardo Teixeira (1992) *Mascaras: Masks*. Sevilha, Portugal: Expositao Universal de Sevilha. ► Robbins, Warren M. and Nancy Ingram Nooter (2004) *African Art in American Collections*. Surrey, England: Schiffer Books. ► West, Harry G. and Stacy Sharpes (2002) "Dealing with the Devil: Meaning and the Marketplace in Makonde Sculpture." *African Arts* 35(3):32-9, 90-1.

Museography: Notes on Material Culture features research undertaken by Anthropology Museum interns and curatorial assistants. For more information, contact Terri Castaneda, Ph.D. (tac@csus.edu).