



Dan - Mahou mask

Dan people, Ivory Coast

XIXth Century

22 cm

Provenance:

Private collection, France (acquired in the 60's / 70's)

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These masks, very rare, evoke or recall the diseases of the Dan forest region. Some of these diseases are recurrent in the tropics and equatorial: hygiene conditions, polluted and infected water plus misery are factors in the development of these diseases. Masks are used in a prophylactic and therapeutic way, they are not a mere representation or evocation of the disease, and not to frighten but to ward off and be beneficial to the village. These diseases, in the animist perception, are not understood and lived as the fact of a biological order, but that of the order of occult forces. The soothsayers interpret these phenomena and propose the solutions to ward them off. These mask with deconstructed, asymmetrical and deformed faces, are thus designed for this purpose in a mode of theatricalization and shared experience by the community.

This object of art has a thick charge in its internal part, it has also been the object of offerings on the visible face which reveals reddish traces, probably resulting from projections of palm seeds chewed. These practices are particularly common in Dan, Mahou and also Kono countries, in the region of the three borders (Ivory Coast, Guinea and Liberia).

This Dan - Mahou mask is also of a great rigor of writing, with a plastic organization of lines and volumes that gives it both a dynamic and a remarkable balance.

Dan masks with asymmetrical faces are extremely rare. Certain studies were only able to identify seven other examples : three were collected by George Harley, Van de Velde collection, André Level collection, private collection and Laermans collections.