

Honolulu Academy of Arts

Heads

Selected Works from the Galleries

AOA Gallery #25

NIGHT DANCE MASK (KAVAT)

Papua New Guinea, New Britain
Baining people
Bark cloth and bamboo
Purchase, 1988



Imagine a dance taking place at night in the dark forests of the Baining Mountains of New Britain. Giant masks with huge round eyes painted red and black glow in the firelight. Night dances are part of an initiation ceremony for young men who, upon reaching a specific age, advance into a different grade level. Learning to make masks are part of the initiation. The *kavat* masks represent wild bush spirits and refer to such things as animals, insects, birds, trees and leaves. Large sheets of bark cloth are stretched over a bamboo framework and then painted. The masks have an open mouth through which the dancer sees. The dancing lasts until sunrise when the villagers chase the masked spirits back into the bush.

MASK (kavat) SEE NIGHT MASK
Papua New Guinea, Gazelle Peninsula, New Britain
Baining people
Bark cloth, bamboo, pigment
Purchase, 1988

Imagine a dance taking place at night in the dark forests of the Baining Mountains in New Britain. Giant masks with huge round eyes painted red and black glow in the firelight. Night dances are part of an initiation ceremony for young men who, upon reaching a specific age, enter into a different grade level.

Learning to make masks is part of initiation. The kavat masks represent wild bush spirits and refer to such things as animals, insects, birds, trees and leaves. Large sheets of bark cloth are stretched over a bamboo framework and then painted. The masks have an open mouth which allows the dancer to see. The dancing lasts until sunrise when the villagers chase the masked spirits back into the bush.

NIGHT MASK (kavat)
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Baining barkcloth masks are worn in day and night ceremonial cycles that celebrate fertility, death, and initiation. The daytime rituals commemorate: the role of women in procreation, the harvest, and the deaths of other villagers. Masks are ornamented with designs of plants, symbols of growth and fertility. Nighttime masks represent spirits of the bush, which are associated with the male domain.

Night dances are supervised and promoted by the men's society. At a specific age, young males were taught to make and dance with these masks for their initiation ceremonies. They are an important part of the young men's initiation and mark their entrance into a higher grade level. The kavat masks represent wild bush spirits and refer to such things as animals, insects, birds, trees and leaves. Large sheets of bark cloth are stretched over a bamboo framework and then painted. The masks rest on the dancer's shoulders, allowing him to see clearly through the open mouth.