

In-between space

Mask

This tall mask is modelled on a growing tree. The red pigment stands for female fertility and the growth of the embryo in the mother's belly. Growth is dependent on nourishment; in this sense the mask is a reference to the people's dependence on the growth of crops.

- 1 H 377 cm; bark fibre, wood, cane, pigment; Uramot Baining, Gaulim, Gazelle Peninsula, New Britain, Papua New Guinea; before 1989; Collection Volker Schneider; Vb 30228

Ancestral figure

This carved figure is Janus-faced but only has arms and legs on one side. The statue represents a deceased big man of earlier days.

- 2 H 240 cm; tree fern; island of Ambrym, Vanuatu; before 1912; Donation Felix Speiser-Merian; Vb 4362

Grade figures

This carved figure represents a woman. It was believed to have protective powers and was created in memory of a high-ranking woman.

- 3 H 265 cm; tree fern; island of Gaua, Banks Islands, Vanuatu; before 1912; Donation Felix Speiser-Merian; Vb 4374

To create a grade figure, the men take the rootstock of a young tree fern for the upper and use the stem for the lower part of the body. This figure has two faces, one on top of the other, which indicates that the man commissioning the carving was of high rank.

- 4 H 270 cm; tree fern; island of Ambrym, Vanuatu; before 1912; Donation Felix Speiser-Merian; Vb 4364

A fern statue indicated the grade a man had reached. They were created in honour of living or deceased high-ranking members of the male grade-taking society *sukwe*. The *sukwe* society was a principal institution that lent men orientation and guidance.

- 5 H 190 cm; tree fern; island of Ambrym, Vanuatu; before 1912; Donation Felix Speiser-Merian; Vb 4510

The *sukwe* was a strictly graded, secret male society. By making prestations a man could rise in rank. In Ambrym there were ten grades. Only men of highest rank were honoured with a fern figure.

- 6 H 226 cm; tree fern; Wuro, island of Ambrym, Vanuatu; before 1983; Collection Christian Kaufmann; Vb 29402a

House posts

The house posts supported the floor and roof constructions of the ceremonial men's houses. The richly carved roof supports were the tallest posts. Due to frequent flooding during the rainy season, most houses along the Sepik were built on stilts. Thus the posts were pivotal, both in an architectural and a mythical sense. They usually carried names and were associated with specific clan ancestors. In the myth of the first ceremonial men's house it is recounted that the house was built under water and served as a residence to various ancestral and other spirit beings. As far as spirits and ancestors are concerned, water still plays a key role in the people's belief, as indicated by the wavelike ornaments on some of the posts.

- 7 H 312 cm; wood; Kingai, hinterland of Timbunke, Sepik region, Papua New Guinea; before 1962; Collection Franz Panzenböck; Vb 25362
- 8 H 330 cm; wood; Kingai, hinterland of Timbunke, Sepik region, Papua New Guinea; before 1962; Collection Franz Panzenböck; Vb 19618
- 9 H 344 cm; Kingai, hinterland of Timbunke, Sepik region, Papua New Guinea; before 1962; Collection Franz Panzenböck; Vb 25880
- 10 H 412 cm; wood, cone shell; Kreimbit, Sepik region, Papua New Guinea; before 1959; Collection Alfred Bühler; Vb 22076
- 11 H 660 cm; wood; Kingai, hinterland of Timbunke, Sepik region, Papua New Guinea; before 1962; Collection Franz Panzenböck; Vb 19615
- 12 H 705 cm; wood; Kingai, hinterland of Timbunke, Sepik region, Papua New Guinea; before 1962; Collection Franz Panzenböck; Vb 19613
- 13 H 658 cm; wood; Kingai, hinterland of Timbunke, Sepik region, Papua New Guinea; before 1962; Collection Franz Panzenböck; Vb 19616

Post of the men's house kàtkatkoár

Together with its counterpart this post formed part of a pair in the ceremonial men's house of Aibom village. They supported one of the house's two roof girders. Originally the posts were longer by about half a length, but for shipping they had to be sawn off at ground level.

- 14 H 375 cm; wood; Iatmul, Aibom, Kumalio River, Sepik region, Papua New Guinea; before 1965; Collection Meinhard Schuster; Vb 23584
- 15 H 385 cm; wood; Iatmul, Aibom, Kumalio River, Sepik region, Papua New Guinea; before 1965; Collection Meinhard Schuster; Vb 23585

Dance ornament

This Baining dance ornament from New Britain consists of a head with an upper and a lower jaw, resembling a snake. It is formed of a vine framework and attached to a staff decorated with ornamental patterns. It forms part of a larger assemblage, but it remains unclear how the head was originally attached to the cylindrical or sticklike body underneath.

- 16 L 270 cm; bark fibre, pigment, bamboo, vine; Uramot Baining; Gazelle Peninsula, New Britain, Papua New Guinea; before 1914; Collection Hiltrup Sacred Heart Mission; acquisition; Vb 28015

Carved ceremonial crocodiles

The carved crocodiles from the Karawari River represent pivotal beings in the local totemic clan system. They always appear in pairs and stand in a mythological kin relationship with the people. In their role as powerful spirit beings they support the men at war and on hunts. They feature human as well as animal traits.

- 17 L 710 cm and 723 cm; wood; Konmei and Mansamei, Karawari River, Sepik region, Papua New Guinea; before 1959; Collection Alfred Bühler; Vb 22093, Vb 22078

Bis poles

The Asmat decorate the poles with ancestral emblems and headhunting symbols. They are made of hardwood found in the mangrove forest and placed upside down with the roots facing upwards. The position symbolizes the intermediate world where the souls of recently deceased people reside.

- 19 H 598 cm; wood; Asmat, Papua, Indonesia; before 1967; Exchange with Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde Leiden; Vb 25277

According to Asmat belief, the first human being was carved from wood. The Asmat are excellent carvers. After carving, the bis poles, which can reach a height of up to eight metres, are daubed in lime. The colour white stands for the realm of the dead.

20 H 521 cm; wood, lime, fibre string; Asmat, Digul River, Papua, Indonesia; before 1963; Collection W. A. Dogtorom; Vb 19026

Shortly before the bis festival, the poles are decorated and positioned in the village. The souls of the dead are summoned to leave the intermediate world and join in the ancestors in the beyond. Later, the poles are destroyed.

21 H 375 cm; wood; Asmat, Eilanden River, Papua, Indonesia; before 1923; Donation Paul Wirz; Vb 6316e