

## ***Walu Antelope Mask***

1900-1971

Dogon peoples, Mali

wood, metal, and pigment

1971/2.26

The *walu* mask is among one of the most popular masks of the Dogon people. Embodying the form of an antelope, the *walu* mask is performed during a *dama*, a funeral celebration marking the end of the mourning period for a deceased loved one.

Typically, a *dama* takes place several months after the burial of the deceased, allowing family members enough time to gather resources needed to put together the large celebration. At the celebration, many different types of masks are performed. *Walu* masks are generally performed by younger members of the society as this mask is easier to carve and does not need to be commissioned. Instead, dancers carve the *walu* masks themselves.

Each mask is carved new for a *dama*. Contrary to widely held stereotypes that Africa is timeless and stuck in the past, masks are carved anew for each *dama* to celebrate the dead. A variety of masks are made today specifically for *damas*, and this mask is one example.

Along the sides and front of this mask, white and black geometrical patterns are painted which evoke an antelope. Antelopes are strong and athletic creatures. Thus, these masks are frequently worn by dancers.

The dancer who wears the *Walu* mask also wears a costume that consists of a fiber hood, skirts, armbands, and bandoliers over the chest. During the performance, the dancer uses two sticks to simultaneously imitate the mating calls of an antelope and men working in the fields.

written by **Ophelia Deng**