

Walu Antelope Mask

1900-1971

Dogon peoples, Mali

wood, metal, and pigment

1971/2.26

The *dama* (meaning “post-mourning”) ceremony is a performance by the male initiates of the Dogon *Ava* mask society. The maskers of the *Ava* reenact events of their spiritual ancestors to restore order and balance to the living world after death. French anthropologist Marcel Griaule did research work in the 1930's and recorded traditional masks and felt that the performances of the Dogon people showed the connection between their contemporary culture and the past ancestral times. In the past, *dama* celebrations were exclusive to the Dogon people, but over time they have been tailored for tourism. The *dama* ceremony displays the history and progressiveness of Africa.

Most of the traditional masks are said to embody the ancestral spirits that are projected through the performance of the dancers. The *walu* (meaning “antelope”) masks are admired for the grace, beauty, and strength exhibited in the performance. The *walu* mask specifically symbolizes the antelope ancestor, *Walu*, who was assigned as protector of the sun by *Amma*, the creator god.

The face of the mask has an overall box shape with a set of large horns and small pointed ears carved on top. When worn by maskers, the *walu* mask has an anthropomorphic essence displayed between man and antelope which is reinforced through the performance. The performer dressed as the *walu* will use a long stick to support himself and makes aggressive movements with the horns to chase away other maskers. This dance commemorates *Walu*, who fought until his untimely death on the Earth.

written by **Leandra Chapman**