

Topic: African Masks and Masquerades

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Slide 2: Map of Africa, circles mark areas where dancers were recorded on videos in the presentation

Slide 3: Facts about Masks

Slide 4: Facts about Masquerades

Slide 5: Bwa Masks in Performance

Bwa masks are danced at initiation ceremonies for young girls and boys, for funeral, memorial services and harvest festivals.

During 15 day initiation ceremony, initiates are taught the meanings of the symbols of the masks, how to be a respected member of the community and the dangers of not following the path of proper behavior established by the ancestors.

Slide 6: Bwa Mask, detail

Symbols in mask: double zig-zag line represents the path of the ancestors.

Crescent shape at the top is the moon, importance of time in the ceremonial year when masks are danced.

Checkerboard pattern on the back represents the value of learning, white representing initiates and black representing elders, emphasizes the reliance between the young and the elders.

Initiates receive a white goat hide to sit on. As they get older, it ages and darkens as they become an elder.

Slide 7: Female Dance Headdress (Yamban)

Danced at weddings by strongest man in community – weighs 45 pounds or more

Honors the senior women and contributions to the community, raising children and teaching them the proper ways

Intricate hairstyle represents the creativity and patience needed by mothers, as well as their perseverance, since can take many hours to do properly

Facial scarification shows ranks earned by the woman

Flat breasts beautiful, have nurtured many children

Slide 8: Brass Senufo Funeral mask

Mask made of brass, photographed at funeral of female elder in Poro (society),

One of several maskers, all initiates of the middle grade, who danced at this event.

Funeral dancing competitive, yet essentially a celebration of the life and family of the deceased.

Youthful energy, reinforced by bright scarves and cloths as emblems of civilized life and by active arm movements.

Mask itself is meant to remain nearly motionless. **MORE**

Forms, materials and gestures are all considered nayiligi, “freshly beautiful” by the Senufo, and it is the complete character in motion that needs to be understood as the work of art, not its individual elements of mask and costume.

Slide 9: Basinjom Mask

Cloth, feathers, wood, porcupine quills, mirrors, herbs, raffia, cowry shells, rattle, eggshell, metal, genet cat skin, H: 85 inches

Basinjom (God’s Medicine) a detective masquerade, finds evil (witchcraft) and expels it from the community.

Medicine, in Ejagham terms, is a knowledge of plants and herbs that God provided to fight evil and criminals. This includes disrespecting one’s lineage.

Some of the implements and materials in the costume:

Knife, whose blade had been perforated with two eyes, Basinjom can see evil.

Porcupine quills, protect from strong elements, including thunder and lightning

Eyes that act as mirrors to see into other worlds, especially at night

Snout, like crocodile, can speak for the people about controversial things

In his mouth, a King Stick, most powerful tree in forest, to protect bodies

Herbs in various places to serve as protection

Deep blue and black cloth, it will “not hold death”

Genet cat skin, invoking the spirit of the animal who shields Basinjom from harm

The village people gather in the square and Basinjom arrives with an entourage of drummers and percussionists. He dances around the group and stops at the person/people who are the source of the conflict in the community. He is very specific about their evil deeds. After they admit their guilt and say how they will reform, they are welcomed back into the community.

Slide 10: Egungun maskers

Egungun masquerades, veneration of ancestors.

Different traditions throughout different groups in Yoruba Land.

Believed ancestors capable of helping living community if they are properly honored.

Egungun are identified with specific families; play a regulating role in the family and serve as a link between the living and the dead.

These egungun masks are from southern Yoruba, in the Remo area. Like all egungun in that area, they are fashioned of cloth.

Costumes of brilliant patchwork panels trimmed in red move and flare, rise and fall, as the dancers whirl. Surrounding the head is a box-like construction covered with matching fabric. Some costumes are embedded with charms.

Slide 11: Two Gelede Masks in Performance

Gelede masquerades honor the Great Mothers.

Dancers perform in the markets of Nigeria, which are run by women.

Function of the days long performance is to please the Great Mothers and to correct bad behavior through dances, riddles and song.

Oro Efe, King of the Night, leader of society and servant of the Great Mothers, starts the program at 10 PM, goes through the night.

Masked figure with an elaborate costume blesses the audience and the powers of the universe and does his best to dissolve community tension through satire, ridicule, jokes and jests. He has physical and supernatural power and spiritual authority. **MORE**

All thefts, sex scandals, corruption, political disputes and abuses of power are his subjects. The performer stresses the effect of these bad behaviors on the community.

Slide 12: Gelede performer resting

Next afternoon, masquerade starts, may last for days.

Joyous celebration of dancing and drumming. Children and teenagers dance first.

Master dancers perform in pairs and the pair must exactly mimic the partner's motions as they sing and recite slogans and proverbs. Drums and rattles around ankles.

Masks reflect the bad behaviors that are to be expelled from the community.

Costumes double the size of the dancers.

Final dancer represents the deified female ancestor, appears to reassure the community of her blessings and will bring success and goodness to the community.

Slide 13: Gelede mask – male with sunglasses

“A liquor barrel, dark glasses, fine-toothed comb and a cigarette over one ear are elements of a headdress that jokes about a certain elite.

Two groups of expatriates with Europeanized attitudes not well received.”

One group was from Brazil in the late 19th century, spoke Portuguese, were Catholic, and tended to segregate themselves.

Others were from Sierra Leone, were Protestant and more British oriented.

This could also refer to European colonialists who overindulged in drink, wore sunglasses and smoked.

The masks would jest and get people to behave the proper way.

Slide 14: Dogon Maskers, Kanaga and Fulani Women

Front: Fulani women identified by masks made of fiber and cowrie shells representing their high-crested hairstyles.

Back: Kanaga masks are considered both female and a bird; supposed to be carved the individual initiates into Awa Society and are linked to circumcision rites.

Slide 15: Dogon Maskers in performance, Kanaga masks

Masks are danced for funerals of men and include mock battles and mimicking of wild animal behavior. Day after funeral, procession of mourners, symbolically expelling man from village.

2nd day after funeral, dance to symbolize the destruction and chaos brought by death.

In video, see long, tall mask is called the “tree” or “big house” symbolizing a great family. Researchers have recorded over 75 different types of masks, some represent abstract ideas.

The masks are swung around vigorously and dipped to the earth, possibly representing communication with the earth spirits.

Slide 16: Dogon Kanaga masks - Show video

Slide 17: Dogon stilt-walkers

Have no specific information, let's just enjoy the video.

Seems to me part of a mock battle, certainly a display of strength and agility

Slide 18: End of presentation