



Incense Burner

Date

ca. 600-900

Primary Maker

Maya (archaeological culture)

Medium

pottery and paint

Description

An extraordinary, two-piece incense burner, this figurine depicts the dancing ritual clowns that were priests of God N, the aged earth deity. Throughout Mesoamerica ritual clowning was used to mark transitional periods such as the end of the calendar year, and ritual clowns held key roles in the performance of ceremonies meant to resolve the potential chaos that accompanies beginnings and endings. One side of the figure wears a woven or netted cap with rolled ends, the characteristic cloth headdress of God N, while the other side has the tonsured hair

characteristic of the personified pa glyph in Maya art, which represents a ritual clown with monkey aspects. The individual wears a long loincloth that reveals both legs, anklets, and knots of rope on both arms to signify the ritual status of the costume. A goggle-eyed mask of coarse woven cloth covers her or his face and a dance rattle is held in the right hand. Two-part effigy vessels of dancing ritual clowns have been found at the Early Classic site of Kaminaljuyu in modern day Guatemala and it is likely this figurine dates to the same period.

Dimensions

Overall: 14 1/2 x 10 x 6 in. (36.8 x 25.4 x 15.2 cm)