



Costume [Ekun Egungun]

Date

ca. 1950

Primary Maker

Nigeria, Yoruba people

Medium

cotton, velvet, cowrie shells, glass beads, leather and dye

Description

Egungun, a word that means "powers concealed," refers to a festival held annually in each Yoruba town to celebrate ancestral leaders: kings, founders of lineages, and distinguished elders in general. Clearly, the masquerade costume used in the festival is designed to suggest the presence of hidden, mysterious power. The wearer peers out through the panel of loosely woven cloth or netting at the top center. As he dances, he whirls more and more rapidly, and the layers of cloth expand dramatically to convey the idea of great power being

mysteriously generated from within. The layers of brightly colored, luxurious imported cloth express the idea that the wealth and power of outsiders has been appropriated by Yoruba kings for their own benefit and for the benefit of their people. Underneath, older layers and linings of local handwoven cloth suggest great age and the power of tradition. The zigzag red edgings and the arrangement of angular patterns in the patchwork panels are coded messages of power and danger.

Dimensions

73 1/2 x 82"