

Ancestor Board (Kwoi)

Date

late 19th to early 20th century

Primary Maker

Artist Unknown

Medium

wood and paint

Description

Each initiated Namau man owns a decorated oval board, which is kept in the men's ceremonial house. The image represents a clan ancestor who is able to act as a mediator between its human owner and the kaiamunu, creator beings from the time of the founding of the world. The boards are placed in close association with human skulls and with the skulls of pigs and crocodiles, totemic animals associated with the clans. An ancestor board may be handed down from father to son. The boards themselves, not the designs on them, are considered sacred, full of "heat," menacing and dangerous, their power increasing with age. The most powerful kwoi were made from boards taken from old communal clan canoes. The herringbone patterns around the edges of the boards are the same designs found on the canoe gunwales.

Dimensions

Overall: 49 3/4 x 7 x 1 5/8 in. (126.4 x 17.8 x 4.1 cm)



