

Commemorative Post (Vigango)

Date

late 19th century

Primary Maker

Giriama people

Medium

wood and pigment

Description

Commemorative posts, or vigango, honor especially influential and important deceased members of Gohu, a men's graded initiation association. They are erected in special shelters where the living members of the group meet and where the most important elders live. Offerings are made at the base of each figure as a gesture of respect for revered ancestors. In form, these figures are part of a widespread distribution of vertical shaft or pole-like funerary markers throughout East Africa, from Ethiopia in the north to Zimbabwe in the south. The Giriama version of this tradition consists of flat planks decorated with chip carving in a manner similar to that practiced by the Swahili from the old cities along the East Africa coast. The geometric designs on the posts suggest body decoration or anatomical elements such as a navel, nipples, or hands folded across the abdomen. The simple round heads may be a reference to the shaving of men's heads when they are initiated into Gohu.

Dimensions

Overall: 66 1/4 x 6 1/2 x 3 in. (168.3 x 16.5 x 7.6 cm)



