

Dog-faced baboon We mask



- *kpanhi*
- Wood, animal hairs, plant fiber, fur and oil paint
- Côte d'Ivoire, We
- H. (without beard): 26 cm
- INV. 1008-16

This highly rhythmic composition – jutting forehead, long cylindrical eyes, projecting nose complete with fangs – is set in an inverted triangle, the angles of which constitute the wide open mouth and the wide ears.

The wearer of a similar mask observed in a Wobe village in the subprefecture of Kouibli in October 1986 explained his features himself: “His name, *kpanhi*, means dog-faced “baboon”. Like the monkey, he climbs the trees in the bush to observe the actions of

man in the village. That is why his face recalls the main features of a baboon’s face, including its fangs. Everything about him represents his magic: he can change into a snake to follow a man (a snake skin, surrounding his forehead, is attached to his headdress), or he can change into a baboon or an antelope (his headdress ends in a wooden crest in the form of antelope horns), to follow a man. Everything drawn on him represents the things he can change into, his magical powers.”

As an observer of all of man’s activities, it is he who informs the great mask as to who the truly guilty party is at the time of disagreements. He is thus a sort of “detective mask” and is also aided by a “mirror” (stripped of its reflective surface) which he holds in his hand, and in which he “sees” – through sorcery – the face of the guilty party.

Marie-Noël Verger-Fèvre, *Arts of Côte d'Ivoire. Volume 2*, musée Barbier-Mueller, 1993: p. 81.