

AFRICAN ART COLLECTION

Mano people, Liberia, Do River

Masquerade (deangle)

1939

Wood, cotton, fiber, metal, cowrie shells, feathers, vegetable dyes

78 × 29³/₄ × 28³/₄ in. (198.1 × 74.3 × 73 cm)

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. W. E. Manis

S-77-22

Deangle, a masquerade performed by Mano men, is the name of a cheerful, nurturing, and beautiful female spirit. Among the Mano and other related groups of Liberia, masks are the embodiments of spirit beings who enter the world of humans. They appear in various guises and perform in initiations and other key ceremonies. Deangle appears in ceremonies for male initiations and also begs for food from the families of the boys isolated in the initiation camps. Although the mask embodies a female spirit, the costume is worn by a man whose movements imitate those of women and who speaks in a highpitched voice. This complete Mano deangle masquerade costume includes a characteristic tall conical cap made of local men's weave cotton cloth with alternating indigo-dyed and natural-colored stripes and studded with cowries. The masquerader's body covering is composed of a tunic of the same cloth and a full raffia skirt. The masquerader's identity was thoroughly concealed from head to toe with these garments and a wooden face mask. The mask, with finely modeled features, slit eyes, and filed teeth made of tin, images the concept of ideal feminine beauty.

The mask was collected in 1939 by botanist W. E. Manis, who worked for the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company in Liberia. Manis commissioned the mask, then acquired it after its first performance, so it lacks the heavy patina of many masks found in Western collections. The condition and quality of the complete masquerade, which includes both the wooden face mask and all accoutrements still intact, are rarely seen in Western collections. In its entirety, it tells us much about Dan-complex masquerade history, cultural meaning, and aesthetics.

