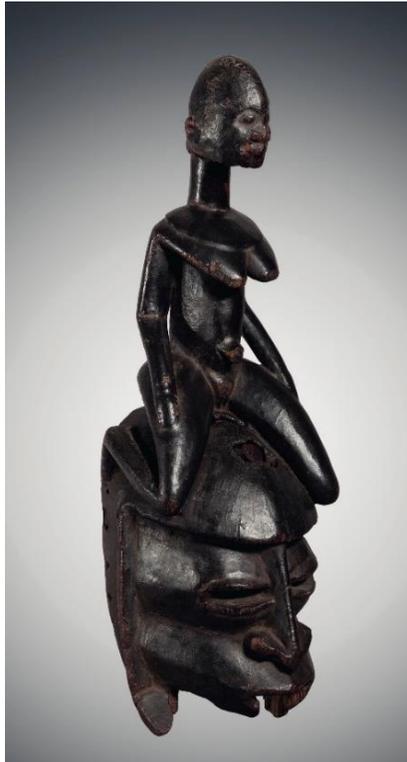


CHRISTIE'S

PRESS RELEASE - PARIS - FRIDAY 3RD MARCH - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A DOGON MASTERPIECE FOR SALE AT CHRISTIE'S PARIS ON 4 APRIL 2017



The Rasmussen-de Havenon Dogon mask
Mali, 17th-18th century
Estimate: €2,500,000-3,500,000

Paris – Christie's France is honored to offer at auction on 4th April, the Rasmussen-de Havenon Dogon mask which stayed in private hands for more than twenty years. This exceptional mask was discovered in the 1950s through a network of African merchants, including Mamadou Sylla in Bamako, one of the most important amongst them. In the mid-1950s, Sylla sold it to one of the most significant merchant of the Parisian marketplace: René Rasmussen. His friend Gaston de Havenon became as passionate of African Art thanks to his several business trips to Paris, which enabled him to discover the famous Parisian art galleries including those of René Rasmussen and Robert Duperrier. It was only a few years later, in the early 1960s, that Gaston de Havenon managed to acquire the famous mask that he will keep in his collection throughout his life. One year after his death, in 1994, his fabulous collection was sold at Drouot. At that time, the Dogon mask appeared on both sides of the sale catalogue celebrating this masterpiece beautifully. It was acquired by a private collector and stayed in the same family until this day.

Susan Kloman, International Director of the department: "This is an incredibly exciting moment for the art market and Paris to witness the return of this iconic masterpiece. This archaic mask in a unique style by a master sculptor of the 18th century Dogon, who could rival his Western contemporaries Bernini or later Rodin in originality and quiet power. It is an indelible work appearing in all of the major references on African art. Our offering this April represents only the second time in a century the work has been available at auction".

Sale: Tuesday 4 April 2017 at 4 pm

Viewings: 29 March to 3rd April from 10am to 6pm and April 4 from 10am to noon

Christie's: 9 avenue Matignon, 75008 Paris

Notes to the Editors:

These make up the Dogon cultural identity, and their significance cannot be separated from Dogon cosmogony, mythology and history.

In the present case the *satimbe* mask honors Yasigine, a mythical woman belonging to the first generation of humans, primordial ancestor and first woman dignitary of the *Sigi* ceremony (G. Dieterlen, *Masks and Mythology Among the Dogon*, African Arts, 1989, vol. 22, n°33, p. 35). Yasigine is linked to both the creation of the world and of *awa*, the institution of the society of masks that introduced the first *Sigi* ceremony and celebrated afterwards every sixty years. This is why in songs accompanying the dance of the *satimbe* mask she is called Yasamma, “wife-sister” of the mask (Dieterlen, *ibid.*, p. 38).

The Primordial Couple

The Rasmussen – de Havenon mask has always impressed by its exceptional iconography: unlike the *satimbe* masks whose female figure on top is generally standing the woman in the present case is laying on her knees while striding a male face. The subject of the kneeling woman is very common in Dogon art and has its origin in a ritual posture that has been photographed and documented by Griaule during funerals where the widow and the sisters of the deceased would kneel down in front of his house (M. Griaule, *Masques Dogon*, 1938, p. 291, ill. 50). “It is a sacred gesture to be found throughout Kagoro art and in terracotta statuary from the inland Niger delta” (de Grunne, 1994; for a detailed discussion B. de Grunne, *Ancient Sculpture of the Inland Niger Delta and Its Influence on Dogon Art*, African Arts, vol. 21, 4, 1988). In reference to the motif of Yasigine, the primordial woman, it is clear that the duality female-male of the present mask can be interpreted as the primordial couple, a concept so central in Dogon cosmogony: “The celestial powers themselves were two, and in their earthly manifestations they would act as a couple: the Lébé and the Seventh Nommo formed a living couple; the ancestors of the great mask and the seat-of-the-mask were an ancestral couple.”(Griaule, 1948, p. 188).

As de Grunne remarks though, “this object remains unique in its style in the known corpus of Dogon masks” (de Grunne, *idem*). This uniqueness is due mainly to the great age of this mask – this mask is considered the “last object witnessing a type of mask for which today no other illustration survives.”

In Dogon art sacred objects, to which the permanent masks of the *Dama* and *Sigi* belong, were hidden in the caves of the cliff to be protected against the intrusion of the non-initiated. They were preserved in sacred spaces where sacrifices and libations were regularly poured upon them. The black and thick patina of this mask indicates a long ritual use for several generations.

Gaston de Havenon (1904 - 1993)

Born in Tunisia he emigrated to the United States at the age of twenty. He was an important businessman and founder of a major cosmetics and perfumes company. As a friend of many artists of the prewar period such as Soutine, Gorky or Noguchi he became passionate about their art and collected their works. Later on, as the eclectic and enthusiastic collector of unquenched curiosity he was, and thanks to his friend Eliot Elisofon, he fell passionately in love with African art. During his business trips to Paris he discovered the galleries of René Rasmussen and Robert Duperrier in Saint-Germain-des-Près.

Both gentleman-dealers quickly became friends and both proved indispensable in allowing him to build a fantastic collection. His collection was sold one year after his death. On that occasion, now remembered as a mythical event of the time, the Dogon mask, prominent on both the front and back of the sale catalogue, was celebrated as its absolute highlight and star.

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**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and are reported net of applicable fees.*

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