Emmett & White
ANTIQUES & INTERIORS

Early 20th-Century Lega Bwami Kayamba Mask

£175

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REF: 5065

Height: 40 cm (15.7")

Width: 29 cm (11.4")

Depth: 15 cm (5.9")

Description

A powerful early 20th-century Kayamba mask of the Lega people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Created for use within the Bwami association, this compelling work belongs to one of Central Africa's most sophisticated artistic and philosophical traditions.

Among the Lega, Bwami was a graded institution through which ethical values, social responsibility, authority, and knowledge were transmitted. Its masks and other ritual objects were not simply decorative; they served as visual aids in performances, initiations, and the teaching of proverbs. Every form, material, and gesture could carry meaning, allowing ideas to be communicated through a shared language of metaphor.

The Kayamba is one of the important Lega mask types associated with Bwami. It is traditionally understood to embody intelligence, perceptiveness, and astuteness-qualities valued within the society's moral and intellectual framework. Unlike many masks made principally to conceal the wearer's identity, Kayamba masks were used within a more complex ceremonial setting and could be worn during ritual performance or displayed as potent objects of rank and instruction.

Its striking abstracted form reflects the remarkable visual economy of Lega art, in which simplified facial features and sculptural balance achieve an exceptional expressive force. The mask's presence lies not in naturalistic representation but in its controlled geometry, symbolic resonance, and the accumulated character of its carved surface.

A highly evocative work of early 20th-century African art, this Kayamba mask would make an important addition to a collection of Lega, Bwami, or Central African art. It is equally compelling as a sculptural object, carrying with it the history of a cultural tradition in which art, philosophy, performance, and social knowledge were inseparable.

Originally acquired by Lieutenant-Colonel Sydney C. Lockyer-Nibbs during his service across the British Empire in the early to mid-20th century. Over this period, he assembled a notable collection of tribal art and ethnographic objects from Africa and the Far East.

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