



Nuo Theater Mask - Guizhou Province, Southwest China - 19th Century



2 950 EUR

Period : 19th century

Condition : Etat d'usage

Width : 16,5 cm

Height : 27,5 cm

Description

NUO THEATER MASK - MONKEY CHARACTER (HESHANG ??) Guizhou province, southwest China - 19th century Wood, old patina with mahogany highlights Internal signs of use - Traces of red pigment on the lips - Red wax stamp on reverse Height: 18.5 cm - With base: 27.5 cm - Width: 16.5 cm Provenance: Former Marie Crouvisier Collection, Paris - Liliane and Michel Durand Dessert Collection, Paris This mask depicts the Heshang (??), the Monk, one of the most emblematic and popular figures in the Nuo theater repertoire. A ubiquitous figure in Guizhou's rural and ethnic communities, the Monk embodies a delightful ambivalence: a spiritual figure and sacred jester all rolled into one, he's the one who laughs, teases, sweeps the floor and tests the audience's faith - without ever

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provoking catastrophe. The face sculpted here is immediately recognizable: shaven, domed skull, symbol of the monastic condition, half-closed eyes crinkled by a sneer, slightly deformed, half-open mouth and, above all, a protuberance in the center of the forehead - a distinctive mark which, according to local traditions, signals a supernatural nature or an accumulation of spiritual energy (qi). This rare detail lends this mask a particularly expressive and ritualistic character. Nuo theater (??) is one of China's oldest dramatic forms, rooted in the shamanic practices and exorcism rites of rural communities in the center and southwest of the country. In Guizhou province - populated by numerous ethnic minorities (Miao, Buyi, Dong...) - it remains exceptionally vital to this day. Nuo ceremonies take place at key moments in the agricultural and religious calendar: lunar new year, funerals, rites of passage, conjuring up epidemics. Masked dancers embody deities, ancestors and archetypal figures who circulate between the world of the living and that of spirits. The mask is no mere accessory: it is the temporary receptacle of the entity it represents, consecrated by rituals before each performance. The Monk plays a special role here: with his humor and facetiousness, he unravels the tension between the sacred and the profane, making the ceremony accessible to all. He dances, sweeps, tests, teases - and it is precisely through this playfulness that he fulfills his ritual function. Carved in dense mahogany wood, this mask bears witness to remarkable technical skill: the volumes are soft yet precise, the treatment of the wrinkles around the lips and eyelids reflects a keen observation of the human face. The deep, lustrous old patina, the result of decades of use and care, gives the object an almost mineral presence. The red pigments on the lips are a reminder that this mask was worn, lived and ritualized - not for the eyes of a collector, but to dialogue with the gods. Its dual Parisian provenance - the Crouvisier collection, then the Durand-Dessert collection, a

well-informed milieu linked to the contemporary art market and the primitive arts - attests to a trajectory of early recognition and exemplary conservation. A rare piece for the quality of its patina, the precision of its iconography and the presence of the frontal protuberance. To be compared with the Heshang masks documented in the collections of the Musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac and in specialized literature on the Nuo theater of Guizhou. Sold with certificate from expert Serge Reynes and invoice from Galerie Ocarina.*Shipping costs on quotation by DHL carrier Careful packing