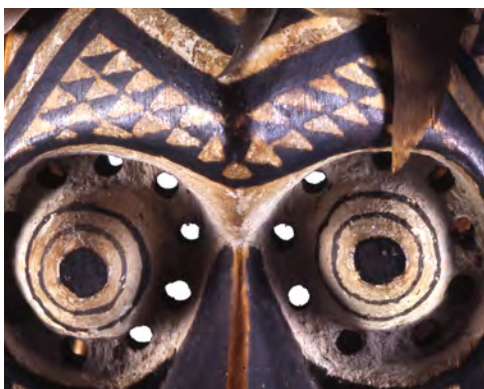




SEPTEMBER 2010

Dividing and Designing a Face

Unknown artist of the Kuba people, Congo, Africa
Male Mask (Ishyeen Imaalu)



VISIT THE BMA
and peek through the
small holes around
Ishyeen Imaalu's
eyes.

Kuba people, Congo (Kinshasa). Detail, *Male Mask (Ishyeen Imaalu)*. c. late 19th–early 20th century. Wood, cloth, feathers, fiber, cowrie shells, pigment. 15 ¾ inches high. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of the Jamosil Foundation, Alexandria, Virginia, BMA 1989.150

Look in the mirror. You'll see that there are a lot of places on your face that are just plain skin. Your forehead, your cheeks, your chin, and even the small spaces between your eyes, nose, and mouth are all quite bare. When Kuba artists from the Congo created masks, they filled all those empty spaces with lively patterns.

This oval mask is divided into sections that have been painted with black, white, and yellow designs. A bold line zigzags across the **forehead** between rows of small black and yellow triangles. Bulging, cone-shaped **eyes** are surrounded by rings of nine peepholes that allow the person behind the mask to see out. (The dark centers of the eyes, which appear to be wide open, are actually painted black.) Two black circles around each eye resemble patterns that encircle the eyes of a chameleon, a type of lizard that is common in the Congo.

Diagonal stripes on each **cheek** represent tears that stream down the face during times of sorrow. Arch-shaped bands suggest flared **nostrils**, and a collection of dots fills the area above the **lip**. A checkerboard pattern marks the line of the **chin**.

The dancer who wore this mask during funerals and special ceremonies covered his whole body with a long black shirt and red skirt decorated with monkey skins. He attached a seed rattle to each ankle and kicked his legs high in the air as he danced. The Kuba people named the masked dancer Ishyeen Imaalu, and viewed him as a warrior who could protect them from conflict and trouble. In Kuba communities, real warriors wore feathers in their hair as a sign of their high status.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Design a mask by first dividing the face into sections, then filling each area with a bold repetitive pattern. Make sure that no space is left empty.

Compare the eyes of *Ishyeen Imaalu* with the eyes of a chameleon. (For images, Google "chameleon eye".) Create a mask that exaggerates a characteristic feature of a bird, fish, insect, or other animal.

PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.

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Kuba people, Congo (Kinshasa). *Male Mask (Ishyeen Imaalu)*.

c. late 19th–early 20th century. Wood, cloth, feathers, fiber, cowrie shells, pigment. 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches high.
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of the Jamosil Foundation, Alexandria, Virginia, BMA 1989.150