

Exaggerating a Crow's Face



VISIT THE BMA and look into the crow's mouth. Can you imagine seeing the dancer's eyes inside?

Crow Mask

Mambila people, Cameroon, Africa

If you were a farmer, you'd likely see plenty of crows flying over your fields. They'd make a big racket with their incessant caws and squawks, then swoop down to feast on the crops you'd just planted. The artist who carved this mask lived in the African country of Cameroon in a village where most of the people were farmers. When the adults went out to their fields to sow seeds or tend their crops, the children went along to shoo away the crows.

Twice a year, during harvest celebrations, masked dancers appeared in the village. One of the dancers wore a crow mask that fit over his head like a helmet. Since the mask's eyes had no openings, the dancer had to look out through the big open space inside the crow's beak. He hid his body underneath a full-length costume made of feathers or leaves from the wild banana plant.

This crow mask, with two unlikely horns on the back of the head, appears to be as bold and brazen as the real crows that foraged for grain in the farmers' fields. Its enormous bulging eyes remind us that real crows have sharp eyesight and can spot the smallest worm on the ground as they fly overhead. Erect ears double for arched eyebrows that make the eyes look even more striking. And although no sound emerges from the bright red wide-open mouth, we can almost hear the crow's hoarse and raucous chatter as he helps himself to some of the treats that the hardworking farmer has planted.

Challenge for Students

Compare *Crow Mask* to a photo of a real crow. (Try this link: http://www.birding.in/images/Birds/rajiv/jungle_crow.jpg) Do real crows have large tubular eyes, stand-up ears, or horns? Design an animal mask that exaggerates the shape or size of an animal's eyes, ears, mouth, and head in order to dramatize its appearance, natural abilities, and habits.

Print the image on page 2 for your students.

THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART



Mambila people, Cameroon, Africa. *Crow Mask*. Early 20th century. Wood, polychrome. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Barry and Toby T. Hecht, Bethesda, Maryland, BMA 1987.146