

# Basic Detail Report

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## Dance-Mask

### Date

1775-1825

### Primary Maker

R.F. Seale

### Medium

Wood

### Description

Dance mask made of painted wood, showing the custom among the NA-AS (Nishga'a Tsimshian) women of wearing a block of wood in the upper lip. Art production among the Coastal First Nations was often divided by gender. Tsimshian women made textiles and baskets, which usually involved geometric patterns. The men were in charge of carving and painting, especially objects with spiritual significance. This type of art is usually based on natural and spiritual forms, using animal and human imagery. The representation of spirits is often highly

stylized, obscure, and somewhat distorted. Masks, as well as musical instruments, fall under the purview of men. Masks are used for many different functions in the Tsimshian culture, for secular and religious purposes including events such as dramatization of clan or family tradition at potlatches, and for use in certain rituals at initiation ceremonies. There are two classes of Tsimshian carvers: *ukgilyae*, who carve only secular objects, and *gitsontk*, who carve the objects used in religious initiations. Secular masks are usually more naturalistic, and spiritual ones are generally more grotesque. The Tsimshian political system is elaborate; the most characteristic masks are worn by the chiefs in the dramatic presentations at potlatches. The performances portray actual and mythical incidences. The masks are usually made out of wood, red cedar or alder (which has uniform texture and hardness). They are carved using adzes, straight and curved knives, and drills. The use of color is limited, but is sometimes used to emphasize sculpted lines or to add independent designs. Significant facial features such as eyebrows, eyes, nostrils, and lips are painted informally. The colors of paint used are black, red, blue, green, and blue-green, which are obtained from natural pigments.

### Dimensions

Object/Work: 270 x 185 mm