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Dance Headdress (Chi-Wara), unknown Bamana artist

Arnold Lehman: These dramatic headdresses—called *ci-wara*—were created by the Bamana people of Mali. The photo here shows similar headdresses in use by a pair of young dancing men. They are fastened to basketry caps and worn on top of the head, with a cloth hanging down to cover the dancer's face.

The wooden headdresses are carved in the shape of antelopes—a large male with curved horns and an elaborate mane, and a smaller female carrying a baby on her back. The Bamana people believe that one of the first creatures created was an antelope, called *ci-wara*. By digging the ground with his forepaws, the *ci-wara* taught the Bamana how to till the soil and therefore become farmers. Curator William Siegmann explains the symbolism of the headdress:

William Siegmann: The male antelope has a large mane, and it has a kind of zigzag pattern on it, which is supposed to represent the idea of the course of the sun. The fiber that hangs down from the headdress represents the rain, which is necessary for agriculture, and the horns represent, in a sense, the millet stalks that are the principal food crop in this area.

Arnold Lehman: The *ci-wara* ceremonies mark the beginning and end of the agricultural season. They are used to teach ecological values and to celebrate the fertility of the land, animals, and humans. Since humans, not antelopes, carry babies on their backs, the baby on the back of this female antelope suggests that the fertility of animals and humans is interrelated.

For more information about these objects, be sure to visit www.brooklynmuseum.org