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Banda Mask, unknown Nalu or Baga artist

Arnold Lehman: This *banda* mask was made by the Nalu or Baga people of Guinea, for use in the ceremonies of a secret men's society. Curator William Siegmann describes its striking composite of animal and human features:

William Siegmann: If you look at it frontally, you'll see that it has the features of a human face. And then, if you look at it from the side, you'll also see that it has large jaws that look like a crocodile's jaw. In addition to that, it's got large horns, which are like those of an antelope, and you'll see a tail that's curled between the two horns in the back, which actually represents the tail of a chameleon. Now, these are mythical ancestors and mythical beings that play an important role in Baga mythology.

Arnold Lehman: It is worn diagonally on the head with the dancer looking out through the jaws.

This is a particularly fine example of the use of pigments in African art. The white color comes from kaolin, a fine white clay used in porcelain. The black comes from soot, and the orange comes from red clay.

Today, the people who would traditionally have danced with the *banda* mask have become Muslim, so these masks are no longer used in traditional ceremonies, but they are sometimes still performed in public for entertainment.