



AFRICA

# MASKS NEVER DIE

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GUINEA BISSAU. VACA BRUTO MASKS DEPICTING COW SPIRITS (COWS ARE QUITE IMPORTANT TOTEMIC ANIMALS FOR THE INHABITANTS OF THE BIJAGOS ISLANDS) PERFORMING A RITUAL DANCE CALLED KOGNOCA ON THE UNO ISLAND IN THE BIJAGOS ARCHIPELAGO



SECRET SOCIETIES, IN AFRICA, REPRESENT THE TRADITIONAL SOCIETY, A KIND OF PARALLEL AUTHORITY. THEY REVEAL THEMSELVES THROUGH THE MASKS APPEARANCE: EVERY MASK HAS ITS OWN MEANING, AND ITS APPEARANCE BRINGS A CLEAR MESSAGE TO THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

*'MASKS TALK. AND LISTEN TO MEN AND TO THEIR ETERNAL THIRST FOR LIFE, THEIR DESIRE TO LIVE FOREVER WHILE THEY KNOW THEY'RE JUST MEN. MEN IN NEED TO DOMINATE THEIR FEARS AND HOPES – THAT'S WHEN THEY TRANSFORM THEMSELVES IN MASKED MAN'.*

IN THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY THE MASK PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE: IT REPRESENTS THE APPEARANCE OF A SPIRIT COMING FROM THE FOREST OR THE SAVANNA TO RULE MEN'S ACTIONS, TO SCARE PEOPLE OR ENTERTAIN THEM, TO IMPOSE PEACE OR INSTIGATE WAR, CELEBRATE FUNERALS OR INITIATION RITUALS. IN THE WHOLE AFRICA THE WORD 'MASK' DOESN'T INDICATE JUST WHAT'S COVERING THE FACE OF THE MAN BUT IT MEANS INCARNATE SPIRIT, PRESENT SPIRIT. THE MASK WEARER LOOSE HIS INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY TO TRANSFORM HIMSELF IN SOMETHING ELSE. THE MASK WEARER MAY DIE, THE MASK NOT: '*A MAN MAY LEAVE ME (DIE), AND HE WILL BE REPLACED. BUT A MASK WILL NEVER DIE. YOU'LL NEVER SEE A MASK'S GRAVE. WE'RE ABOVE MEN*'.

CAMEROON. RITUAL DANCES OF  
THE KUO GAING WARRIORS' SECRET  
SOCIETY. DANCERS WEAR MASKS  
COVERED WITH COWRIES, RECALLING  
THE SCULPTURES COVERED WITH  
GLASS PEARLS OF BAMILEKÉ KINGS



BENIN. ZAMGBETO MASK  
REPRESENTING NIGHT SPIRITS





BENIN. EGUNGUN MASKS, ALSO CALLED REVENANTS, REPRESENTING THE SPIRITS OF PEOPLE COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD



CAMEROON. MASKS OF THE LALI SECRET SOCIETY DANCES AT THE FUNERAL OF A BAMILEKÉ NOTABLE. DANCERS ARE WEARING SACKS DECORATED WITH FEATHERS RECALLING THE SCULPTURES COVERED WITH GLASS PEARLS DEPICTING NOTUÉGOM, THE FOUNDER OF THE BANDJOUN BAMILEKÉ KINGDOM



BURKINA FASO. THE SPECTACULAR WHIRLING DANCES  
PERFORMED BY THE MASKS OF THE BOBO ETHNIC  
GROUP DURING MASKS' CELEBRATIONS IN KIBIDWÈ,  
THE OLDEST DISTRICT OF BOBO DIOUASSO

BURKINA FASO. A MASK OF THE BOBO ETHNIC GROUP WALKS IN BOBO DIOUASSO PASSING BY THE OLD, SUDANESE STYLE MOSQUEE. HERE ISLAMIC, CHRISTIAN AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS COEXIST SIDE BY SIDE





BENIN. EGUNGUN MASKS, ALSO CALLED REVENANTS, REPRESENTING THE SPIRITS OF PEOPLE COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD, CHASE THE INHABITANTS OF COVÉ

GUINEA BISSAU. VACA BRUTO MASKS DEPICTING COW SPIRITS (COWS ARE QUITE IMPORTANT TOTEMIC ANIMALS FOR THE INHABITANTS OF THE BIJAGOS ISLANDS) PERFORMING A RITUAL DANCE CALLED KOGNOCA ON THE UNO ISLAND IN THE BIJAGOS ARCHIPELAGO





BENIN. EGUNUN MASKS, ALSO CALLED  
REVENANTS, REPRESENTING THE SPIRITS OF  
PEOPLE COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD



IVORY COAST. MASK OF THE  
ETHNIC GROUP OF GUÉRÉ, IN  
THE VILLAGE OF BIN-HOUYÉ



IVORY COAST. MASK OF THE  
ETHNIC GROUP OF GUÉRÉ, IN THE  
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CAMEROON. DANCES OF THE ROYAL SECRET SOCIETY TAKUMBENG AT THE CHEFFERIE BAMILEKÉ OF BAUT. IN THE PAST THIS DANCE WAS PERFORMED ONCE BACK FROM A WON WAR. MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY WEAR MASKS DEPICTING ANIMALS' HEADS, AND A MASK ON STILTS RECALLS THE SCULPTURES COVERED WITH PEARLS OF OLD ANTHROPOMORPHIC THRONES



BENIN. EGUNGUN MASKS, ALSO CALLED  
REVENANTS, REPRESENTING THE SPIRITS  
OF PEOPLE COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD



IN AFRICAN'S MASKS WORLD THE MAGNIFICENT, SPECTACULAR SIDE IS IMPORTANT BUT THE SOCIAL ASPECT IS FUNDAMENTAL, DEFINING THE MASK AS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MEN'S WORLD AND THE SUPERNATURAL ONE – A WORLD ALWAYS PRESENT IN AFRICAN SOCIETY, IN EVERY ACTION OF EVERY SINGLE PERSON. THE MASK BECOMES A REGULATOR OF WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE COMMUNITY, SOMETHING YOU MUST FEAR. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE CITY OF BOBO DIOLASSO, IN BURKINA FASO, THERE ARE PLACES WHERE MASKS MAKE DANCE PERFORMANCES AND ARE CONTROLLED BY GRIOTS (THE MUSICIAN LEADING THE DANCE), WHILE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE TOWN THE MASKS GET OUT OF HUMAN CONTROL AND TERRIFY PEOPLE WITH WHIPS AND STICKS. AT THE SAME TIME, THE SHOW OFF AND THE DANCE OF THE MASKS BECOME A GREAT, COLLECTIVE THEATHER PERFORMANCE, WITH PEOPLE CHASING AND CHALLENGING THE MASKS TO DISPEL THEIR FEAR OF THE SPIRITS WORLD.



BURKINA FASO. MASKS OF THE BOBO ETHNIC GROUP DURING MASKS' CELEBRATIONS IN KIBIDWÈ, THE OLDEST DISTRICT OF BOBO DIOUASSO



BURKINA FASO. MASKS OF THE BOBO ETHNIC GROUP DURING MASKS' CELEBRATIONS IN KIBIDWÈ, THE OLDEST DISTRICT OF BOBO DIOUASSO



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