

Yam Mask (New Guinea) 426#

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Land

The yam means abundance from ancestral spirits
that dwell in the largest yam of the festival.
Survival is attained
from this perennial herbaceous vine.

The Maprik Village people of New Guinea
dance and chant as their ancestors before them.
Attached to the largest yam is the Yam Mask,
a circle of woven reed like a basket.
Chalky eyes bulge out
and look in two different directions.
Nose is a straight line leading to pursed lips.
A headdress of small, white feathers explode from the top
and come forward in an arc.

The moon is still awake in the morning sky
over the western foothills as I sing and dance
on this flood plane, a natural oasis in the urban.
The sticks crunch under my feet
as I dance in between the eucalyptus trees.
I touch the underside of the crabapple leaves.
They flow through my fingertips like lace.
My voice drifts across the crusted field.
The coyote spends time with me,
one ear up and the other sideways,
and endeavors to obtain water
from the dry creek.



Illustration by Cindy Rinne after New Guinea Yam Mask