Public access description

This mask belongs to an ancient tradition of masked drama and court dance known as Bugaku. It would have been worn by the character playing Ryo-O (also known as Ranryo-O), the Dragon King and is carved from a single piece of wood. The dragon was carved from several pieces that were then joined together. The mask is coloured with natural paints and pigments and the details of the eyebrows and moustache have been added with tufts of white horse hair. The moveable eyes are attached to a metal rod to which the chin is also attached by leather thongs. The eyes were originally gilded with the surrounding area painted bright red. The dangling chin-cup is lacquered in the rich orange-red colour of negoro lacquer, and may be a later replacement. The magnificent dragon wraps around the head of the mask with his chest raised, the mouth open to reveal his teeth and tongue, and the small wings spread wide in a threatening attitude. The head and body are painted green, with details of the scaly body in black; the chest and under-belly are highlighted in red. The face, eyes and teeth are gilded with details in red and black. There are two curly gilt metal whiskers.

Descriptive line

Bugaku mask of the Dragon King (Ry?-?), carved and painted wood wih horse hair, showing a threatening dragon wraps around the head of the mask, Japan, 1450-1550.

Dimensions

Height: 19.8 cm mask only, Height: 27.2 cm with dragon, Width: 20.8 cm

Museum number

W.516-1922

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O76818/ryo-o-mask-unknown/