Ceremonial Porcupine Tunic



Porcupine ceremonial tunic

"*The Kaka people create intriguing and dramatic tunics, completely covered in porcupine quills, front and back. Porcupine tunics from the Kaka people are quite rare because of their active function in religious practice*"

The Kaka people of central Cameroon have a population of 123,000. Their primary language is called *Yamba* (yam), which also refers to their primary religious practice. The Kaka, like many of their West African neighbors, are traditional animists. This religion is deeply rooted in The Kaka peoples' ethnic identity and dance is part of most religious ceremonies and rituals. Such ceremonial dances accompany a multitude of events that include births, funerals, or invoking the spirits of ancestors to cure ills, increase fertility, and even to bring good fortune and success.



The porcupine quills illustrate protection from malevolent forces both seen and unseen

Dance is an important aspect of both life and leadership in Kaka communities; Members of the *ntsham* society – formed by respected elders – dance to bring about spiritual possession so they can more effectively dispense advice and mediation. The dancers aim is to work themselves into a trance under a very hot day's sun, allowing them to communicate with the spirit world. Publicly displaying possession in this fashion affirms the elder as an important role in the Kaka community.

It should be noted that Kaka religion is largely concerned with protection from witchcraft or the undue influence of evil spirits. A tool to safeguard the Kaka comes in the form of a very unique and unusual tunic. This intriguing and dramatic tunic is completely covered in porcupine quills, front and back. The quills are attached to a woven fiber base. The nature of this tunic not only illustrates the idea of physical protection from harm, but more importantly of spiritual protection outside sources. Much the same manner that a porcupine protects itself, this jacket was meant to protect the dancer from any malevolent spirits or unseen influences. Ceremonial tunics from the Kaka people are quite rare because of their active function in religious practice.