Himalayan Masking Tradition



Himalayan animal mask from the Terai Region of Southern Nepal (detail)

Focusing attention on the so-called “primitive” or tribal masks of the Himalayas requires adapting the eye to a completely different style regarding Himalayan art than is generally acknowledged in the West. Tribal masks were not subject to canonical rules as applied to Buddhist or Hindu art. Instead, masks were considered products of great ingenuity and instinctive expressionism exhibiting many levels of technical ability.



Himalayan animal mask from the Terai Region of Southern Nepal

The creation of masks revealed the original spirit, beliefs, and visions of the people who created them. They also illustrate how Buddhism and Hinduism, after overcoming shamanic traditions, transformed and even incorporated many of these traditions into local art forms. Some tribal _ masks represent vanished cults and deities, while others remain only as mute witnesses to no longer viable or vibrant cultures.