Traditional Work

DISCOVERING THE SANDE MASK
Sande Society Helmet Mask
Bombax wood, vegetable fiber
16 X 8 X 9 inches
Vai People, Sierra Leone/Liberia

Current Location:
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
(Currently not on display)
Acquired in 1996 as a gift from Landon and Lavinia Clay

http://www.mfa.org/collections/search_art.asp?recview=true&id=4781&coll_keywords=Mende+Mask&coll_accession=&coll_name=&coll_artist=&coll_place=&coll_medium=&coll_culture=&coll_classification=&coll_credit=&coll_provenance=&coll_location=&coll_tag_images=&coll_on_view=&coll_sort_order=0&coll_view=0&coll_package=0&coll_start=1
Five Major Sande Society Mask Characteristics

1. Large Forehead
2. Elaborate Hair
3. Compact Face
4. Neck Rings
5. Deep Black Color
Characteristics Unique to Vai Masks

1. High Hairline

2. Geometric facial features

3. Neck rings accentuated on rear of mask
MFA Mask

VS

Mende Masks

R. Phillips 174, 176
Significance of the Features

- **Forehead**: poise, self confidence, elegance
- **Closed/Slitted Eyes**: hides personal identity, virtuous, modest woman, above earthly desires
- **Lips**: seriousness, composed, in control
- **Hair**: elegance, wealth, also helps identify level of mask (Elder mask, or Dancer’s mask)
- **Neck Rings**: fertility, transition from child to adult, ripples of water
Uses

- Sande Society Initiation Rituals
- Represents everything the Sande Society stands for, feminine ideals
- When not in use, masks are on alters, costume is hidden away

http://www.randafricanart.com/Mende_mask.html
Sande Society

- Is the only society known in Africa in which women are the mask wearers and performers.

- Found in Mende, Vai, Temne, Gola, Bassa, Kpelle cultures in West Africa (Sierra Leone and Liberia specifically)

- Fellowship of women, elder women take care of the younger

- Teaches girls how to be wives

- Social values and morals

http://www.randafricanart.com/Mende_mask.html
The People

Population and Tribal Groups
Population pattern based on number of dwellings per square mile

- Dark Brown: Dense
- Medium Brown: Medium
- Light Brown: Light
- KRU: Tribal group

MANDINGO are widely distributed throughout the country.

In the map:
- The Vai
- Sierra Leone
- Liberia
- Guinea
- Côte d'Ivoire
- Liberia
- Kru
- Mande
- Conakry
- Freetown
- Monrovia
- Robortson

Additional links:
- [http://www.fbi.gov/headlines/sierraleone.jpg](http://www.fbi.gov/headlines/sierraleone.jpg)
The New Label

Sande Society Mask
Bombax wood, vegetable fiber
16 X 8 X 9 inches
Vai People, Sierra Leone/Liberia

The Sande Society is a fellowship of women found in West African cultures, which aims at preparing girls for adulthood. It is the only known society that allows women to wear and perform in masquerades. The mask represents the ideals of feminine beauty that the Sande Society stands for and is worn along with a costume robe and danced in Sande Initiation Rituals.


