Object type: Memorial Figure
Indigenous name: Uli, selambungin lorong type
Culture/location: Malangan, New Ireland
Date: ca 1900
Materials: wood, shell inlay, fiber, pigment
Dimensions: 52 1/2 x 16 x 15 1/2 in.
Institution and accession number: LACMA, M.2008.66.3

Object type: Funerary Carving
Indigenous name: Malangan
Culture/location: Malangan, New Ireland
Date: Late 19th- early 19th century
Materials: Wood, paint, shell, resin
Dimensions: H. 52 1/4 x W. 13 3/4 x D. 13 1/4 in.
Institution and accession number: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007.215.2.

In New Ireland, a complex system of memory production and ceremonial practices lead to the creation of two different types of figures related to funerary practices: the uli and the malangan. An uli is a figure formerly used to honor and remember an ancestor. These figures were kept in men's houses and re-displayed to embody the ancestor they represent. Ulis functioned to contain the deceased community member's soul. On the other hand, malangan figures were made to be destroyed in funeral ceremonies. They too represent an ancestor or embody a spirit, but were meant to be ephemeral and function in the creation of memory. I chose these two figures to compare because at first glance, the figures appear similar and may seem to have similar histories, but upon learning more about them, they function in quite different processes. I find the aspect of memory production an interesting component to New Ireland figural sculptures and wanted to further explore this through these two objects.

The hermaphroditic uli, or memorial figure, was used to represent deceased male chiefs in funerary rites (Wardwell, 1994). The figure above is a hermaphrodite and wears the traditional clothing associated with mourning: a headpiece as well as wrist and ankle ornaments. The hands point above the head and are composed of two smaller figures. The breasts on the figure could represent the importance of fertility and the duty of the chiefs to provide for and protect women and families, while the phallus represents male power (Wardwell, 1994).

The uli ceremony, no longer practiced today, was traditionally performed upon the death of a leader. After his death, the village would sponsor a series of feasts and commission the

creation of a figure, like the one seen here. The figure was meant to be a likeness of the deceased leader in ceremonial garb, and functioned as a receptacle for his soul (Caglayan, 2004). At the conclusion of the ceremony, the figure was transferred to the men's ceremonial house, where it provided guidance for the village and its new leader. Uli were then redisplayed during the long cycles of ceremonies that accompanied the exhumation and subsequent reburial of the skulls of prominent men.

Similarly, the malangan ceremonies were also accompanied by feasting, gift giving, and remembrance. But the ephemeral malagan carvings of northern New Ireland were not made to last. The one shown above is not typical because it has not been destroyed. It is about the same size as the uli figure, with red and white pigment, a cage-like carved structure surrounding the figure, and what appears to be the inclusion of a bird totem. The term malagan refers to a complex series of ceremonies and the visual art forms associated with them. Malagan rites marked nearly all important stages of an individual's life. Possession of rights, similar to copyrights, to specific malagan images and the rituals associated with them conferred status and prestige (The Met, 2016). Men, in particular, competed to obtain rights to the greatest number of malagan. The most spectacular malagan carvings, including the type seen here, were created and displayed during the final memorial ceremony honoring the deceased, which, due to the great expense and extensive preparations involved, often occurred months or years after a person's death. The sculpture represents, and is itself part of, a process which could be better understood as a metaphor for the life force, renewed through death. These images were conceived, analogous to the life force, as renewable and relocatable entities (Rowlands, 1993).

As Kuchler discusses, killing the sculpture was considered a sacrifice that was meant to give the gift of memories (Kuchler, 1988). Sacrifice and the production of memory are thus intertwined. In the complex ceremony, the sculpture was thought to be completely alive, filled with dangerous energy, and then killed. Its decomposition allowed the renewal of an image subjected to memory. The death of the sculpture transforms the visual representation of the figure and of the ceremony into memory.

Through the comparison of these two figures from New Ireland, it is possible to begin to understand the complex ways in which memory is produced through objects in this part of Melanesia. Further, the different uses of the objects emphasize the importance of funerals in remembrance, carrying on legacies through memories, and ways in which objects can be used in ways that challenge Western ideas of memory production.

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