

BRIEF HISTORY OF MASKS

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A mask is a whole or partial cover for the face. The functions of masks throughout the world are remarkably similar. Masks have two main purposes; to conceal the identity of the wearer, usually representing another person or creature, or used as a form of protection on many job sites and in sports.

The use of masks dates back to man's earliest history. The origin of the mask is not known, but evidence of its presence has been found in primitive times, revealing the important role it has played in our lives. Early masks were probably made to represent animals because hunting played a large role in primitive societies. The earliest known allusion to mask use is found in a Southern France cave. It is believed to have been painted around 20,000 BC. The art depicts a human masked in deer skin and antlers.

Masks in traditional societies are not thought of as art objects. They are functioning sacred objects imbued with tremendous power and used for ancestor workshop, healing, funerals, social prestige and control, as well as initiation and fertility rites. Symbolic masks were devised to be worn during ceremonies of many ancient peoples. These masks portrayed gods, animals and spirits and were worn ceremonially for communicating with supernatural forces believed to rule the universe

The classic drama of ancient Greece brought theatrical masks to the height of development. They were slightly larger than life size and made of canvas. They were often fitted at the mouth and made with a small megaphone for amplification of the actor's voice. Masks representing particular emotions or characters are worn in traditional Japanese no plays.

There are many types of commonly known masks that are simple disguises. One such disguise is the domino, which is a plain cloth half mask and is worn on such occasions as a masquerade ball. Another is the handkerchief which can be tied over the nose and mouth and used as a makeshift protective mask. Western outlaws and bandits in the movies found this disguise quite acceptable. Many modern criminals often wear ski masks to cover the entire head, as well as women's pantyhose as a mask.

One of the most commonly recognized types of masks is the false face. It represents another person or creature and made usually of papier-mâché or plastic. It is most commonly worn on such occasions as Halloween and Marti Gras.

Content compiled primarily from the book New Standard Encyclopedia and also the below mentioned websites.

MASK HISTORY LINKS

- <http://www.mpm.edu/collect/mask.html>
- <http://store.yahoo.com/maskstore/historyofmask.html>
- <http://store.yahoo.com/maskstore/>