

HOTEL DES VENTES  
MONTPELLIER

BERTRAND DE LATOUR • JEAN-CHRISTOPHE GIUSEPPI

**Reappearance  
of a rare Fang mask  
from the Ngil  
secret society**

AUCTION  
SATURDAY 26 MARCH 2022  
MONTPELLIER

**ART & COMMUNICATION**

PRESS KIT  
JANUARY 2022



# HOTEL DES VENTES MONTPELLIER

BERTRAND DE LATOUR • JEAN-CHRISTOPHE GIUSEPPI

## Reappearance of a rare Fang mask from the Ngil secret society Auction Saturday 26 March 2022 at 2 p.m.

---

The reappearance of Governor Fournier's Fang mask from the Ngil secret society along with its global publication and its sale by an auction house in Montpellier on 26 March represents **a major discovery in the field of equatorial African art, and, for art history in general.** The purity of its lines and its balanced proportions give it an iconic status in the very limited corpus of masks from the Ngil society. The "Gouverneur Fournier" mask completes the dozen or so other reference specimens known through Western museums and collections. The reason they are so rare is that the traditional rites of customary justice in Ngil society were discontinued in the 1920s, putting an end to the creation of the instruments of this institution. Half of the Ngil masks are in museums and the few that have appeared on the secondary market have broken auction records for African Art, such as the one that sold in the Vérité Collection fetching 5.75 million euros at Drouot in June 2006. That mask, and the one belonging to the Denver Art Museum in the United States, are the two that come closest to the Governor Fournier mask presented here.



Mask from the Ngil society Fang People  
Gabon, Late 19th century  
Soft wood, kaolin, vegetable fibers, fabric  
Height: 55 cm  
Provenance: Governor René-Victor Fournier  
collection (1873-1931)

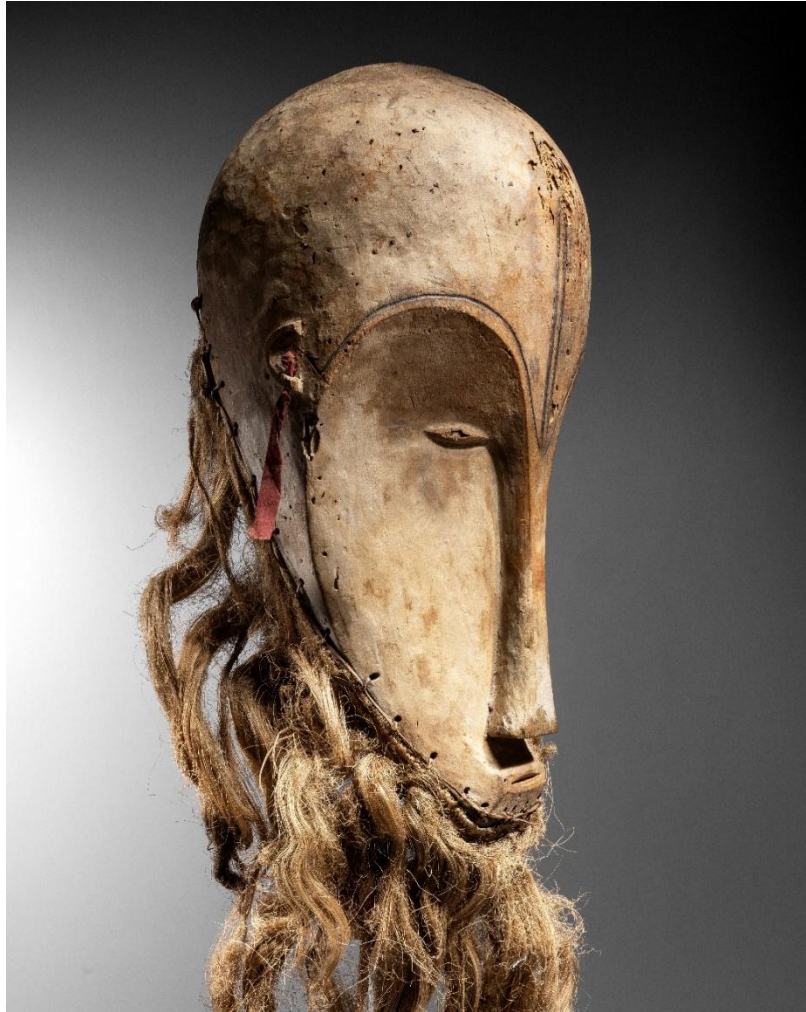
Estimate: €300,000/400,000

EXPERT: Bernard Dulon



*“This majestic-looking specimen is of proven authenticity and remarkable ancestry. In the stylized simplicity of its volumes and the economy of its engraved decorations, it is an exceptional work, particularly rare, worthy of the most prestigious collections”*

Louis Perrois, ethnologist, director of research hon. Orstom/Ird



### **A choice provenance**

This mask – sculpted at the end of the 19th century according to a carbon-14 analysis – was acquired by Governor René-Victor Edward Maurice Fournier (1873-1931) and remained in the Governor's family thereafter. Fournier pursued a career in Africa and in August 1908 was appointed to Dakar where he remained until 1917. Director of the Cabinet of the General Government of French West Africa, then appointed 2nd Class Governor on 26 September 1916, he met Maurice Delafosse who introduced him to the charms of African art. On 20 May 1917, Fournier was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Moyen-Congo, a post from which he resigned on 16 May 1919. Being part of the entourage of Gabriel Angoulvant, Governor of French Equatorial Africa at the time, he was very likely called to several missions in Gabon.

## A museum piece

In 2017, the Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Museum hosted “Native Forests”, the largest show ever devoted to the art of the Gabonese Fang people. The hundred and fourteen works presented masterfully illustrated the various styles as well as the creativity and genius of pre-colonial African sculptors, *like an art history that defines the different degrees of expression and formal variations* (Yves Le Fur).

As part of this exceptional exhibition, a single glass case displayed four masks from the Ngil society, a group of “vigilantes” who traveled through the villages searching for troublemakers, including individuals suspected of witchcraft. These four masks represented almost a third of the total number of masks known to have survived. **At the time, no-one imagined that one of the finest examples had escaped the attention of African art specialists.**

The interest in masks from this region dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, a period of discovery of “negro art” by Fauvist painters. In 1906, Ambroise Vollard asked bronze founder François Rudier to produce a bronze version of a Fang mask belonging to André Derain, who had acquired it from his friend Maurice de Vlaminck. In the catalogue of the exhibition *Primitivism in 20th Century Art*, William Rubin, former director of the Paintings and Sculptures Department at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, specifies that *Picasso, Braque, Derain, and other artists all possessed Fang masks.*



---

**Press contact:** Art & Communication

Sylvie Robaglia - +33(0)6 72 59 57 34 – [sylvie@art-et-communication.fr](mailto:sylvie@art-et-communication.fr)

**Expert:** Bernard Dulon - [bernard@dulonbernard.fr](mailto:bernard@dulonbernard.fr)

**Auction House:** Hôtel des ventes de Montpellier

Bertrand de Latour – Jean -Christophe Giuseppi

194, Chemin de Poutingon – 34070 MONTPELLIER - + 33(0)4 67 47 47 76 -

[jcg@hdvmontpellier.fr](mailto:jcg@hdvmontpellier.fr) - [bdl@hdvmontpellier.fr](mailto:bdl@hdvmontpellier.fr)

# ART & COMMUNICATION

Art & Communication Agency  
29, rue de Ponthieu, 75008 PARIS

Sylvie Robaglia:  
+ 33 (0)6 72 59 57 34  
[sylvie@art-et-communication.fr](mailto:sylvie@art-et-communication.fr)

HOTEL DES VENTES  
MONTPELLIER 

BERTRAND DE LATOUR • JEAN-CHRISTOPHE GIUSEPPI