



“Art of the Mask: A Tool from the Past”

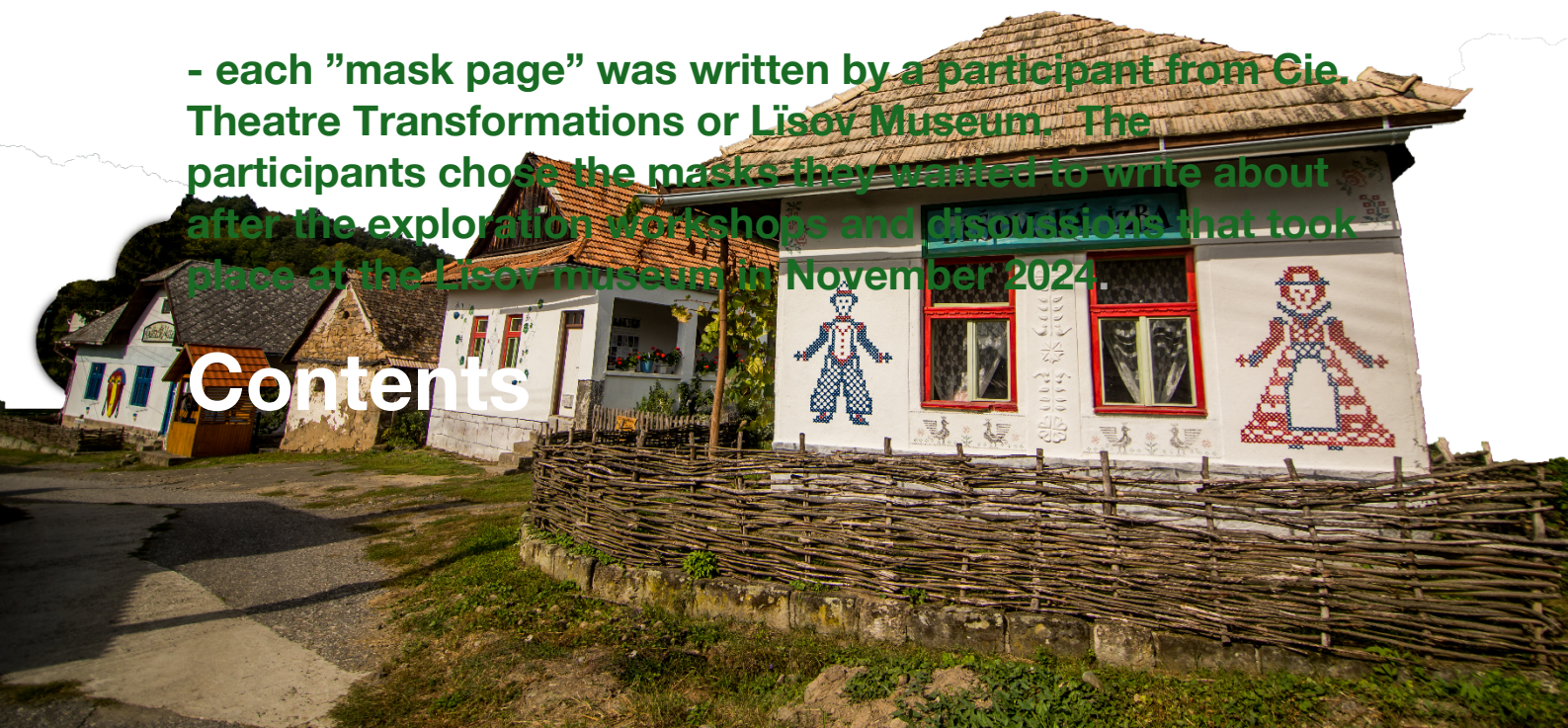
Pedagogical document: museum mask guide

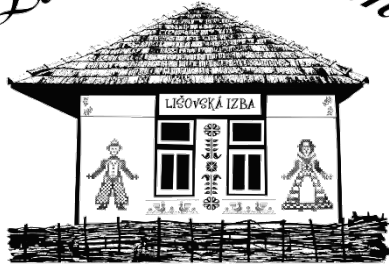
- a handy guides for visitors, providing information and enhancing their understanding of some of the museum's collections.

- A “Focus On” Document - with special “highlights » on certain masks

- each "mask page" was written by a participant from Cie. Theatre Transformations or Lišov Museum. The participants chose the masks they wanted to write about after the exploration workshops and discussions that took place at the Lišov museum in November 2024.

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Erasmus+

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Author: Jakub Dvorský

Exploring the World Through the Art of Masks

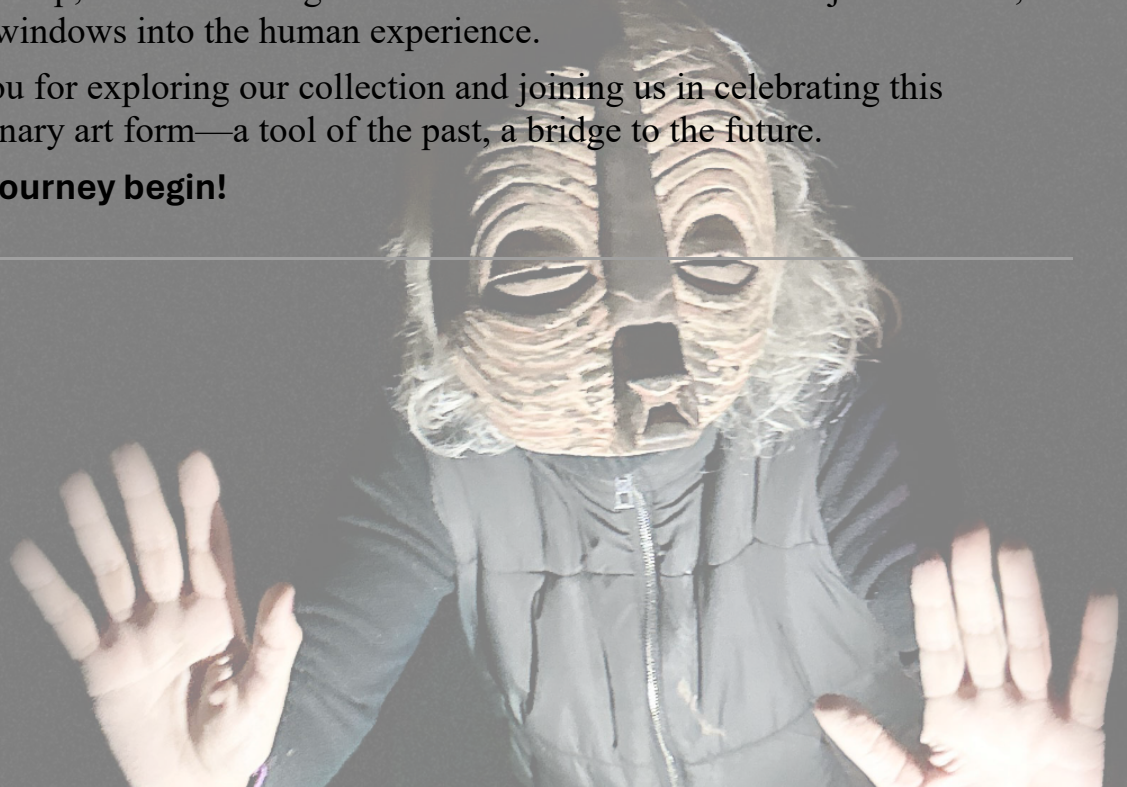
Welcome to the Lišov Múzeum, home to a captivating collection of over 400 masks from around the world. These masks, crafted through generations, tell stories of identity, tradition, and creativity. From African ceremonial masks to Sardinian *Mamuthones*, our collection bridges cultures and showcases the universal power of masks as tools for storytelling and transformation.

This guide was created as part of the Erasmus+ project “*Art of the Mask: A Tool from the Past*,” in collaboration with Theatre Transformations, a cultural organization in France. Together, we aim to preserve and revitalize the art of the mask by blending traditional craftsmanship with innovative approaches. This partnership highlights the shared heritage of masks and their role in inspiring creativity and cultural exchange.

Our goal is to enhance your visit by providing insights into the masks’ origins, craftsmanship, and cultural significance. These treasures are not just artifacts; they are windows into the human experience.

Thank you for exploring our collection and joining us in celebrating this extraordinary art form—a tool of the past, a bridge to the future.

Let the journey begin!





**Congo
(Songwee
masks) by
Hélène /
page 2**

In my parents' house, there was this wooden african mask on the wall, with its long nose, these strange eyes and this half-open mouth that could

let the breath of a smile pass through.

African masks have always fascinated me since then and I worked as much on their stories as on their forms during my studies at the École des Beaux-Arts in France.

Arriving at the Lisov museum, the Songye mask (Democratic Republic of Congo) was there among all the others. Round, wooden, streaked with red, white and dark paint. The eyes half-closed, almost laughing. The square mouth that seems to whisper its story.

Its design is simple and complex at the same time. I felt a gentleness and a mischief that challenged me. The desire to play! In the Lisov caves, I observed and placed the mask on my face, it was neither man nor woman but a being made of density and light. The flames of the candles in the caves of the village danced on the walls... and the mask danced too!

Magical experience. I have since discovered that it is between the sun and the moon. The streaks are inspired by the Bongo antelope. It is animal ... yet much more...

Papua New Guinea (Woven masks) by Tracey - page 3

- Photo x 2 (same mask - upside down)

I was immediately inspired by the woven mask from Papua New Guinea. As a knitting specialist I have always been drawn to masks made using weaving, knitting or crochet techniques. They are made using local natural fibres and paints.

In Papua New Guinea, masks play a crucial role in ceremonies that hold both religious and social importance, often linked to funerary customs, fertility rituals, or healing practices. Additionally, some masks are utilised during festive celebrations or to represent characters in dramatic performances and reenactments of mythological stories.

The Abelam people who live in the East Sepik Province are renowned for their yam cult and they cultivate two types of yams – the yams used as daily food and gigantic yams, up to 3-4 meters long, used for ceremonies. A man's social status is determined largely by his success in growing long yams!

The yam masks or basket masks, are created for ceremonies or used to decorate the large “yams”

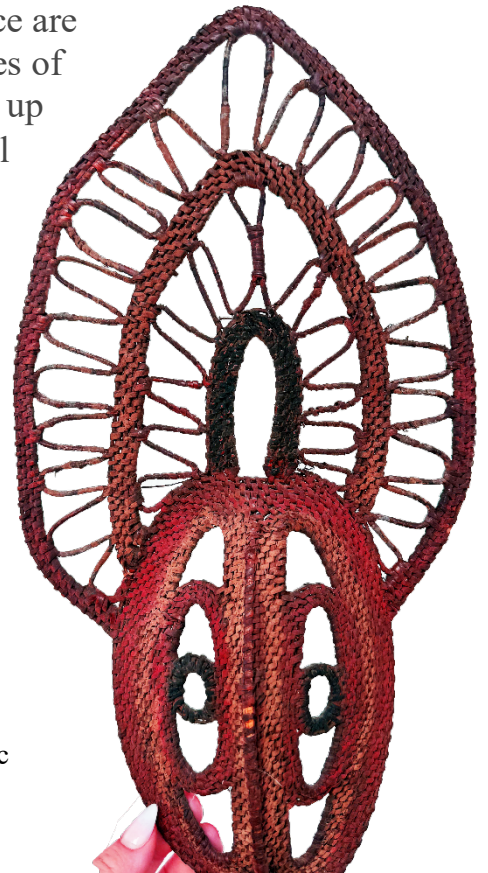
Some of the more intricately designed yam masks have multiple facets. If the actor changes the angle of the mask we discover a different image which can be human, spirit or animal. These masks require great time, reflection and skill both to make and to perform.

Further reading / sources :

The Stars Are Eyes, A New Perspective on the Art of Abelam by Marc Assayag

(Les Etoiles sont des yeux , un nouveau regard sur l'Art Abelam)

<https://www.new-guinea-tribal-arts.com/sepik-masks/>



Page Four: Sardinian Black Masks (Mamuthones)

Author: Jakub Dvorský

The *Mamuthones* masks of Sardinia are a striking symbol of European folklore. I first encountered these masks during a visit to Mamoiada, a village steeped in tradition where the past seems alive in every corner.

The *Mamuthones* procession—masked figures dressed in heavy woolen costumes, adorned with cowbells—was mesmerizing. The rhythmic clang of the bells echoed through the streets, creating a hypnotic and primal atmosphere that felt timeless and deeply human.

The masks, carved from dark wood, have hollow eyes and furrowed brows, exuding an eerie dignity. They are not mere artworks; they are guardians of tradition. According to Sardinian lore, the *Mamuthones* protect communities from evil spirits, embodying both fear and reverence.

As someone passionate about rural heritage, these masks resonate deeply with me. They reflect the resilience and unity of a community bound by its history and traditions.

Much like the challenges faced by my village in Slovakia,

the *Mamuthones* remind me that tradition offers strength and guidance. These masks inspire us to navigate modern struggles while staying grounded in the wisdom of the past, serving as a powerful link between history and identity.



Page Five: Fabric Masks of Eastern Europe

Author: Adriana Dvorská

Fabric masks are a vibrant part of Eastern European culture, showcasing how creativity thrives in simplicity. As a child, I watched women in my village transform scraps of fabric into intricate masks. Using old shawls, embroidered linens, and even worn-out curtains, they stitched playful characters and mystical figures, turning everyday materials into treasures. These masks weren't just for festivals—they were storytellers, weaving tales of celebration, love, and even resistance.

One mask that stands out is one my neighbor made during the Communist era. She used scraps of traditional Slovak embroidery and bold red patterns to symbolize courage. For her, the mask was more than decoration—it was a statement of resilience during a time when tradition was often suppressed.

This deeply connects with my passion for sustainability and design. Fabric masks embody how art adapts, thrives, and preserves identity even in adversity. They remind me of my journey, recycling traditional materials into contemporary designs. Through this project, I hope to share the beauty and significance of these masks, proving that even the simplest materials can carry profound stories and connect us to our cultural roots.



Page Six: Conclusion – A Message of Legacy and Connection

Author: Jakub Dvorský

As we conclude this journey through *The Art of the Mask*, I reflect on the bonds we've built—between the past and present, across European communities, and within ourselves. This project is about much more than masks; it's about the stories they tell and the people who bring them to life.

This collaboration between Slovakia and France has reinforced my belief in the unifying power of art and culture. Seeing young people, artists, and communities come together to create, share, and learn has shown me the resilience of heritage. Each mask crafted, each story told, is a bridge—connecting generations, traditions, and futures.

I leave this project filled with hope. Hope that the masks we've shared will continue to inspire creativity, pride, and connection. Hope that these stories will not only be preserved but spark innovation for the future. To all who read this: may you discover your own mask, your own story, and your unique way of connecting to the world.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Let's continue to celebrate the art of the mask—a timeless tool of expression and unity.

