

# Spirits and Headhunters: Art of the Pacific Islands

February 13, 2010 and ongoing  
Guest Curator – Chris Rainier



Amulet (*Hei Tiki*), 18th century  
Māori people, New Zealand, Polynesia  
Greenstone and wax; 2 3/4" x 1 3/4"

## Bowers Museum Docent Tour Development Materials

Prepared by Mary Jane Schrader  
Approved by Nancy Warzer-Brady, Vice President of Education  
Peggy Hannawell, Docent Guild Education Chairman

January 2010



Sacred Figure, 20th century  
 Tolai People, West New Britain Province  
 Papua New Guinea, Melanesia  
 Wood, paint and fiber

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	3
<b>WALL COPY FOR EXHIBITION</b>	
Introductory Label	4
Pacific Migration	4
Stone Tools	5
Polynesia	5
Micronesia	5
Melanesia	6
New Guinea: Land of the Headhunter	6
Sepik River Men's House	6
The Art of Warfare	6
The Art of the Asmat: Land of the Bis Pole	7
Ritual and Magic	7
The Art of Adornment	7
The Art of Feasting	7
The Price of a Bride	8
Where Masks Still Dance	8
Baining Fire Dance	8
Epilogue	8
<b>FEATURED EXHIBITION ARTIFACTS</b>	9
<b>EXTRA REFERENCES</b>	
Useful Information for Tour Development	17
Glossary	18
Supplementary Enrichment	22

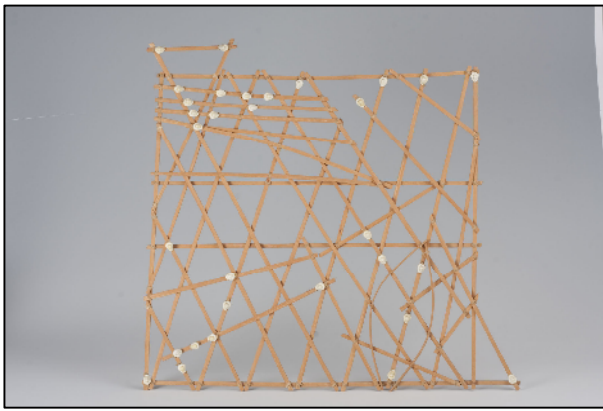
## INTRODUCTION



Orator's Stool (*Teket*), 20th century Iatmul people; Middle Sepik River region, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia  
Wood; 36 3/8 x 18 1/8 x 19 1/2 in.

Photographer Chris Rainier guest curates this exhibition of art from the South Pacific. Spanning the geographic region collectively referred to as Oceania, this comprehensive exhibition highlights masterworks from the three cultural regions of Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia.

A particular focus is placed on New Guinea, land of the headhunter, and the rich artistic traditions infused into daily and ritual life. Submerged into a visually stunning world, the exhibition comes face to face with larger-than-life masks, finely crafted feast bowls, objects associated with the secretive Sepik River men's house, beautiful shell and feather currency, magic figures and tools of the shaman, gorgeous personal adornments, weapons of warfare, and the most precious of human trophies taken in retribution and in reverence.



Kuijlen Island, Marshall Islands, Micronesia  
Palm leaf midribs, fiber and cowrie shell

## EXHIBITION SECTIONS

### Introductory Label

On the eastern edge of the Pacific Ocean thousands of islands lay scattered across the region commonly called Oceania, a term now considered obsolete by many scholars. This vast region of Pacific Islands makes up three cultural zones known as Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Home to islands such as: New Guinea, New Caledonia, Vanuatu and Fiji; to the south, New Zealand; and to the north, Hawaii. The region consists of a variety of ethnographically diverse cultures tied together by a strong relationship with the sea and a complex understanding of ocean navigation. Called Wayfinding, the peoples of the Pacific Islands historically could travel thousands of miles between islands following the ocean swells, trade winds, and stars that guided them in the evening sky. While each region has a unique cultural tradition, the ability of islanders to migrate across vast distances of the region did allow for influences to spread, from the headhunting practices in New Guinea, to the ceremonial clubs and daggers of New Zealand that we see here today. As you journey through time in this exhibition, one is again reminded of the origins of so many rituals and traditions of early man embedded in the peoples of this region. From the deep fertile valleys of New Guinea where agriculture has been prevalent for thousands of years, to the origins of deep sea navigation found in the Wayfinders of the Pacific, man has had a profound symbiotic relationship with the land and the sea....

*Spirits and Headhunters: Arts of the Pacific Islands* will introduce you to the three great divisions of the Pacific Islands through classic examples of the works of art produced there. The focus of the exhibition is Melanesia, and its dominant island, New Guinea. Using Melanesia as our focus, we will see how spirits, and to a much lesser extent headhunting, are included into aspects of daily life...

### Pacific Migration

It is generally believed that the peopling of the Pacific Islands took place in two great waves. Nearly 60,000 thousand years ago people traveling from southeast Asia moved into New Guinea – these people would go on to populate the great island of Australia. Much later, approximately 4,000 years ago a second wave of people, also originating in southeast Asia arrived in New Guinea, settling the north coast and continuing eastward across the Pacific. Over centuries waves of migrations took place, moving not only people but customs, traditions and aesthetic preferences.

One of the greatest stories of human migration is that of the Wayfinding - the ability for the peoples of the Pacific region to accurately travel vast distances across the ocean from island to island - often thousands of miles apart. Up until very recently modern navigators merely speculated how the ancient people accomplished this truly astounding feat. Often dismissed as mere luck, recent discoveries and a resurgence of the ancient techniques of Wayfinding navigation by modern-day Polynesians, has taught us that the skills employed were in fact highly evolved. A combination of generations of knowledge and decades of practice allowed small double hulled canoes laden with people, food, plants, animals - and a

desire to discover new horizons would sail for months across vast seas and land on small pinnacles of land. Wayfinding is a complex weave of understanding the rhythms of the ocean swells, reading patterns in the prevailing winds and clouds, intensely watching the migration of wildlife and birds, and an almost spiritual connection to the destination desired. Very recent discoveries are leading to the assumption that the movement of humans across the Pacific region was not merely one way, moving with the trade winds but rather back and forth multiple times, often repeating journeys in both directions...

### **Stone Tools**

Due to the rugged topography of the island of New Guinea, most of the deep valleys and isolated rain forests were not discovered, or even explored until the middle to late 20th century. This unusual and unique circumstance of human evolution allowed isolated tribes, villages, and human outposts to be entirely uninfluenced by the outside world. What evolved was a unique relationship to the land - and a sustainable model of agriculture and hunting essentially unchanged since man first arrived to the island of New Guinea some 60,000 years ago. The land is rich in volcanic soil and was perfect for the evolution of agriculture. Consequently stone utensils quickly evolved to assist in the tasks of gardening and hunting. Because of the use of these stone tools, still today in some of the more isolated communities, we have some of the world's most intact examples of Stone Age artifacts.

### **Polynesia**

Polynesia, meaning many islands, is a vast sub-region that reaches from Easter Island (Rapa Nui) in the eastern Pacific Ocean, to Hawaii in the north, to New Zealand in the south and west. It is a region of sixty-nine million square miles and over a thousand islands. To speak of Polynesia is to really talk of numerous cultures with different languages and different belief systems. Unlike the other defining regions of the Pacific, royalty and noble birth defined the social order, allowing fate to be decided by man instead of the unseen forces of the spiritual world.

Polynesian languages do not have a word for art, and objects possessed meaningfulness only through an accompanying chant, speech, history or spoken genealogy. Materials used in adornment were meant to endure and had a high value, because of their sacred qualities such as red feathers and human hair or bone, or because of their rarity, such as whale ivory and bone, turtle and pearl shell. Other objects symbolized status and rank including finely made clubs, fly whisks, stools and bowls. Polynesian carving is unique among all of the Pacific Islands for its intricate and repetitive surface ornamentation.

### **Micronesia**

Micronesia, meaning "small islands," is a sub-region made up of more than 2,500 islands that reaches from the island of Palau in the west, to Wake Island in the northeast, to the island chain of Kiribati in the southeast. Its people are renowned for their navigation skills. Though rich in culture today, the region was one of the last to develop a sense of culture. The low atoll islands which lay victim to devastating storms required Micronesians to focus on sustaining life rather than the development of strong cultural practices. Micronesia lacks healthy resources of wood and possesses very little stone - coral and clam shell are used in its place. Material objects are fewer than those found elsewhere in the Pacific Islands, and great emphasis is placed on simplicity of form. The richness of its unique culture today is seen in its predominantly utilitarian artifacts related to the deep connection people have with the ocean and the food it provides.

## **Melanesia**

Melanesia is a complex region with the greatest cultural and linguistic diversity among the Pacific Islands. It reaches from the island of New Guinea (and some of the Indonesian Islands to its west) to the island of Norfolk in the south, to the island chain of Fiji to the far east. Melanesia is unique in the entire region for its culture that is layered with multiple expressions. Every aspect of life in Melanesia is characteristically more flamboyant and varied than the rest of the Pacific largely because the environment is so much more diverse. At the cultural epicenter of Melanesia lies the island of New Guinea. Because of the size of New Guinea, unlike any other island in Melanesia, cultural groups evolved without a profound influence from the ocean. Hence much of tribal art that makes New Guinea so rich is discovered deep in the jungles and Highlands regions of this mysterious island.

### **New Guinea: Land of Headhunter**

Melanesia is dominated by New Guinea, the second largest island in the world and by far the most diverse. The island is politically divided down the center with the independent nation of Papua New Guinea to the east and the Indonesian Province known as West Papua to the west. It is home to a stunning amount of complex cultures and 800 distinct languages spoken. In general, people do not worship gods, but acknowledge the spirit and other beings which share the landscape with them and their ancestors.

Headhunting was widely practiced on the island of New Guinea up to as recently as the mid-20th Century, with some rare examples dating into the 1970's. Headhunting is the act of taking a head, usually from an enemy during a battle, and is a highly controversial subject as it brings up many issues around why we as a species behave this way in war and conflict. Research shows that this was a common practice across the island as a form of ceremony - with tribes desiring hierarchical power over their enemy. The head is the center of the soul, the place of power, and by capturing this "energy" a tribe would gain the upper hand and be in a position of supreme power and control. The individual who took the head would also gain status within the community, as well as on a spiritual level with the spirits of the forest.

### **Sepik River Men's House**

Scattered along the huge Sepik River that flows from west to east in Papua New Guinea is a series of isolated villages. Each of these small villages isolated and self sufficient, developed powerful spiritual beliefs related to the forest and the river. Life was a constant ritual of appeasing the forces of both the good and evil spirits of the environment. A large part of this task was completed in the Spirit House-called the Haus Tambaran. Inside the Spirit House were housed the symbolic artifacts that allowed the initiated to communicate with the spirit world. A dazzling array of shields, masks, statues, orator's chairs, and totems were displayed here. Only warriors who had been initiated were allowed in the House. In the Spirit House every few months there would be an elaborate initiation ritual for the young boys, usually involving scarification of their skin, allowing them to enter their manhood as a warrior, and in the end giving them a respected position in the Haus Tambaran.

### **The Art of Warfare**

Woven into the tapestry of daily life in New Guinea is the act of warfare - a constant re-aligning of relationships between opposing tribal neighbors. Often the three main reasons to conduct battle were over land border disputes, stolen pigs, and the "possession" of women. Battles were agreed upon for location and time - and the ensuing "scuffles" could often go on for months- culminating in someone being hurt or killed in battle. Once everybody agreed that a "fair" battle had taken place, and "payback" was complete, life would go on until another issue arose. Consequently life could be perceived as a long series of battles to remain or reach status as the dominate tribe - therefore having more access to land, pigs, and women.

## **The Art of the Asmat: Land of the Bis Pole**

In the southwest region of New Guinea the tribes of the Asmat lived a life in constant battle with their enemies - war and death were present in everyday life. Consequently the art that was created and carved served to help them win their battles, as well to appease the spirits of the forest in an effort to empower them as they completed the deeds of warfare. The spears, the war shields, the drums, the war canoes, all were richly decorated with the spirits of the forest - animal deities - that help empower the human. The most well known of Asmat carvings is the Bis Pole - a tall vertical post that honors the fallen battle warrior by creating life with a series of anthropomorphous figures carved up to the top of the post. At the very pinnacle of the post is a male figure (the giver of life) with a giant phallus. From death always comes new life and rebirth.

### **Ritual and Magic**

Life in traditional culture throughout New Guinea was difficult. Food supplies, diseases, mortality rates in a tropical environment, constant battling over land and food with your neighbors- all made life uncertain and full of angst. In an effort to have control over these unknowns the tribal people of New Guinea created ways to try and make their lot in life better - and to increase the chances of survival. Over thousands of generations unique relationships with the gods and spirits of the forest were formed. Each village struggled to find the balance between the real world and that of the spiritual-searching to maintain control over an uncertain future full of conflict and mystery. Consequently what involved in New Guinea, is today one of the worlds richest displays of animistic belief systems as witnessed in its art.

### **The Art of Adornment**

The adornment of the body has been integral to all human societies throughout history. But to the cultures of the Pacific and specifically New Guinea, adornment plays a very special role by helping place the person in their social, tribal and wealth status. There is ornamentation that is worn everyday. Form and function play a role together as people conduct their daily chores. Materials used include shell, bone, teeth, seeds, wood, stone, feathers and fur and cordage made from plant fibers. But at times of festivals, social celebrations of marriage or death, or special events that surround mask dances and sing-sings - adornment would play a crucial role in setting one's status within the community. These may include elaborate displays of the treasured bird of paradise feathers, thick layers of coconut oil or ochre spread on the body. Prized possessions of rare stones and large shells that had been passed down over hundreds of generations would be prominently displayed. Social status is the key to understanding the culture of New Guinea...

### **The Art of Feasting**

At the heart of every social gathering in New Guinea is the Pig Festival, a way of bringing together the village or even a larger community. These gatherings can mark the end of a battle, the passing of an elder, or the celebration of a marriage. The day of the event the host provides as many pigs as he can afford - the more the better - as a large pig festival can assure his social status for years to come. The pigs are ritually killed then roasted in a rock pit for hours. As the gathered crowd awaits the food, elaborate shows of organized dances called sing-sings take place. These dances are filled with a dazzling array of costumes of bird of paradise feathers, human skin covered in coconut oil, and powerful rhythmic sounds of drums being beaten for hours - all combined to show a display of power, wealth, and social hierarchy.

## **The Price of a Bride**

In New Guinea where a good relation with your surrounding village neighbor insures your survival, one of the currencies of peace was to “trade” women of the village for peace. In many parts of New Guinea it was forbidden to marry someone within your own village. So consequently elaborate negotiations of compensation would take place to insure families, and villages as a whole, felt the exchange was a fair one. At the center of every exchange were pigs, often large amounts of pigs (pigs are a crucial item of exchange throughout New Guinea culture) as well as shells, stones, and food. While on the surface the marrying of two people drove the transaction, in fact the underlying purpose was a strict protocol to keep the social fabric of the society together in a complex display of fairness and compensation. In the end every person, as well as the community, felt there was no need to go war.

## **Where Masks Still Dance**

Throughout Melanesia symbolic masks continue today to be at the center of tribal culture and spiritual belief systems. Life for the isolated villages and tribal communities was a constant balance between the physical world of the day-to-day - and the unseen and mostly symbolic relationship to the spirit world. For the shamans and spiritual leaders of the community the way to connect and begin to control the world around them was through the masks and the dances that transpired. These mask dances were the visible manifestation of the unseen - and the unknown world beyond their daily struggles. By dancing into being the spirit, mortal man had a chance to control his destiny and talk to the gods, thereby increasing his chances of survival.

## **Baining Fire Dance**

One of the more spectacular displays of ritual and dance in New Guinea takes place in the mountains of the Gazelle Peninsula on the island of New Britain. As the sun sets and darkness falls large fires with deep coals have been burning for hours in preparation. The secret society of men within the Tolai have been preparing elaborate masks of painted white bark cloth, bamboo, limbs of green tropical trees shaped as ghoulish figures created from the spiritual forest. As darkness lingers the masks appear from the forest and race through the fire kicking up embers. The celebration will go on for hours ebbing only as the fire dies and the sun appears on the horizon. The origin of these fire dance ceremonies was to celebrate the birth of new children; the commencement of harvests, and also a way of remembering the dead. The Baining fire dance is also a right of passage for initiating young men into adulthood. The fire dance historically was a male event and the Baining women and children were forbidden to take part or even watch it.

## **Epilogue**

What is it that we discover about this unique and diverse region of the globe that we call the Pacific region? A complex and sophisticated sense of art - yes. But there is more. Embedded in each and every one of these tools, artifacts, and costumes is the very essence of humanity. Each and every one of the items you have seen here is bound to the real world by serving a utilitarian function. Acts of daily survival: birth, marriage, warfare, life, death, payback compensation, and daily food supply. Yet they are also tools of the spirit world - artifacts that symbolically connect us to the world beyond this one - a place where the primordial in us all calls to - tries to connect with, and hopes to appease and be in balance with the spiritual realm. With these tools man can survive in balance with his world. This wondrous part of the globe can again remind us all of the world of our ancestors - a place where the spirits of the forest and ocean still live in our ancient souls...

## SPIRITS AND HEADHUNTERS ICONIC IMAGES

### MARQUESA BOWL

Bowl, 19th century

Marquesas Islands, Polynesia

Wood; 7 x 18 x 18 in.

2004.34.1

Bowers Museum General Acquisition Fund Purchase



### MAORI AMULET

Amulet (*Hei Tiki*), 18th century

M ori people; New Zealand, Polynesia

Nephrite and sealing wax; 2 3/4 x 1 3/4 in.

2009.10.1

Bowers Museum General Acquisition Fund Purchase



### EASTER ISLAND DANCE PADDLE

Dance Paddle (*Rapa*), 19th century

Bowers Museum Docent Tour Development Materials - 1/14/2010 *MJS*

Easter Island, Polynesia  
Wood; in.  
L.2009.11.1  
Loan Courtesy of Mark Blackburn



### EASTER ISALND MALE FIGURE

Male Figure (*Moai Tangata*), 19th century  
Easter Island, Polynesia  
Wood, obsidian, bone, trade cloth; in.  
L.2009.11.3  
Loan Courtesy of Mark Blackburn



### NEW CALADONIA CEREMONIAL AXE

Bowers Museum Docent Tour Development Materials - 1/14/2010 *MJS*

Ceremonial Axe (*Gi Okono*), 19th century  
Kanak people; New Caledonia, Melanesia  
Wood, serpentine and fiber; 28 7/8 x 7 1/4 x 1 3/4 in.  
2009.11.1  
Bowers Museum General Acquisition Fund Purchase



## NEW IRELAND FISH EFFIGY

Carving of a Fish Spirit, 20th century  
Ben Sisia (1931- ), Malagan artist; Libba Village, Kavieng, New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia  
Wood, natural pigments and operculum; 15 x 40 5/8 x 6 11/16 in.  
2006.7.1a,b  
Jordan Community Trust Purchase



## TELEFOMIN DOOR

Doorboard (*Amitung*), 20th century

Telefol people; Telefomin village, Upper Sepik River region, Sandaun (West Sepik) Province, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia

Wood and paint; 109 x 33 1/2 x 1 1/8 in.

2009.5.12

Bowers Museum General Acquisition Fund Purchase

Photograph courtesy of Michael Hamson Oceanic Art



## ARIPA FIGURE FROM KARAWARI

Cave Figure (*Aripa*), c.1600-1800

Ewa people; Karawari River area, Middle Sepik River region, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea  
Wood and paint; 20 1/2 in.

F81.2.3

Previously in the collection of George Clayton Kennedy



## OVERMODELED SKULL #96

Over-Modeled Skull, 20th century

Middle Sepik River region, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia

Human skull, clay, pigment, shell, and human hair; 5 7/8 x 5 7/8 x 7 15/16 in.

99.43.9

Gift of Peter Garrison



## TOLAI SHELL RING CURRENCY

Shell Ring Valuable (*Tabu*), 20th century

Tolai people; East New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia

Shell and rattan; 31 1/2 x 33 3/4 x 4 1/4 in.

2008.9.1



## BARAK MASK

Mask (*Barak*), late 19th – 20th century

Bungain people; East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia

Wood; 17 3/8 x 6 1/2 x 8 1/4 in.

99.76.58

Anonymous Gift



## BIRD HEAD CLUB FROM NEW CALEDONIA

War Club (*Go Porowa Ra Maru*), 19th – 20th century

New Caledonia, Melanesia

Wood; 28 1/4 x 12 7/8 x 2 3/4 in.

99.43.4



## WHALE BONE NECKLACE FROM FIJI

Necklace (*Wäsekaseka*), 18th – 19th century

Fiji, Polynesia

Sperm whale teeth and fiber; 13 x 12 3/4 x 1 5/8 in.

2004.37.1

Don and Barbara Greek Fund Purchase



## SOLOMON ISLANDS CANOE PROW ORNAMENT

Canoe Prow Ornament (*Nguzu Nguzu*), 19th century

New Georgia Group, Solomon Islands, Melanesia

Wood, mother-of-pearl and paint; 12 5/8 x 3 5/8 x 6 3/4 in.

84.37.12





**Carving of a Fish Spirit**, 20th century  
Ben Sisia (1931- ) Malagan artist, Libba Village  
Kavieng, New Island Province, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia.  
Wood, natural pigments and operculum  
15 x 40 5/8 "x 6 11/16 "

## USEFUL INFORMATION FOR TOUR DEVELOPMENT

Establishing a touring theme from a curatorial perspective:

- Exhibition curator, Chris Rainier has told us of great stories of human migration. Using the term "Wayfinding" he describes how these people accurately traveled thousands of miles, "following the ocean swells, the trade winds and the stars to guide them in the evening sky," then to settle on the many islands of the Pacific where they developed their own unique traditions and rituals.
- Bowers Museum curator, Julie Perlin-Lee, has told us that the artistic works of the Pacific people involves objects created for a purpose. Although they vary greatly in form and style throughout the cultures and regions, they include common themes - ones we can use in our tours:
  - The encouragement of fertility
  - Reverence towards the ancestors
  - The propitiation of the spirits of nature.

Further development of your tour:

- The wall label copy outlining the section of the exhibition, pp 4 – 8 provides us with subthemes in which to introduce Bowers Museum artifacts.
- Color photos of these artifacts will be available in a Resource Notebook in the Docent Library.
- Because this show is ongoing, we will gradually mature in our knowledge of these fascinating people. Try to attend as many planned lectures as possible and note other enriching resources available to us.



Erecting a Bis Pole,  
The Asmat people

## GLOSSARY

### Asmat people

The Asmat, an ethnic group of New Guinea, resides in the Papua province of Indonesia. They have one of the most well-known and vibrant woodcarving traditions in the Pacific. Their art is sought by collectors worldwide.

- The Asmat inhabit a region on the island's southwestern coast bordering the Arafura Sea, with lands totaling approximately 7,335 square miles. This area consists of mangrove, tidal swamp, fresh-water swamp, and lowland rainforest. The region is located both within and adjacent to Lorentz National Park and World Heritage Site, the largest protected area in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The total Asmat population is estimated to be around 70,000.
- The Asmat mainly subsist on starch from the sago palm (*Metroxylon sagu*), fish, forest game, and other items gathered from their forests and waters.
- Materials for canoes, dwellings, and woodcarvings are gathered locally.
- Due to the daily flooding which occurs in many parts of their land, Asmat dwellings, built on wooden posts are typically six to nine feet above the ground. In some inland regions, the Asmat have lived in tree houses, sometimes as high as 80 feet.
- The Asmat have traditionally placed great emphasis on the veneration of ancestors, particularly those who were accomplished warriors.
- Asmat art mostly consists of elaborate, stylized wood carving that is designed to honor ancestors. Many Asmat artifacts have been collected by the world's museums, among the most notable of which are those found in the Michael C. Rockefeller Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam.

### Austronesian

- Austronesian languages are a language family that is widely dispersed throughout the islands of Southeast Asia and the Pacific, with a few spoken on continental Asia. It is on par with Bantu, Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic and Uralic, and is considered one of the best-established ancient language families.
- Austronesian peoples are a population living in Oceania and Southeast Asia that speak languages of the Austronesian language family. Austronesian peoples include: Taiwanese aborigines; the majority ethnic groups of East Timor, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, Madagascar, Micronesia,

and Polynesia, as well as the Polynesian peoples of New Zealand and Hawaii, and the Austronesian peoples of Melanesia. They are also found in the Pattani region of Thailand, and the Cham areas of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Hainan, China (remnants of the Champa kingdom which covered central and southern Vietnam). The territories settled by Austronesian peoples are known collectively as Austronesia.

### **Baining People**

- The Baining people are among the earliest and original inhabitants of the Gazelle area of East New Britain, Papua New Guinea. They get their name from the Baining mountains which they inhabit. Their language is also called Baining of which there are a few different dialects.
- They are thought to have been driven to this area by the Tolai tribes who migrated to the coastal areas in recent times. Some think that they may have migrated from the coastal areas to the mountainous interior because of major volcanic activity that took place over centuries. (As recently as 1994, the nearby town of Rabaul was almost completely destroyed by two volcanoes, Tavurvur and Vulcan.)
- The Baining create unusual and dramatic art forms. Giant masks are laboriously made from bark cloth, bamboo and leaves and used just once for the fire dance ceremony before being thrown away or destroyed.
- The origin of these fire dance ceremonies was to celebrate the birth of new children, the commencement of harvests and also a way of remembering the dead. The Baining fire dance is also a rite of passage for initiating young men into adulthood. The fire dance is a totally male event. Traditionally the Baining women and children do not take part in it, or even watch it.

### **Lapita culture**

Lapita is the common name of an ancient Pacific Ocean archaeological culture which is believed by many archaeologists to be the common ancestor of several cultures in Polynesia, Micronesia, and some areas of Melanesia.

- The archaeological culture and its characteristic pottery are named after the type site at which it was first found in Lapita, which is located on the Pacific island of New Caledonia.
- Classical Lapita pottery was produced between 1350 and 750 BCE in the Bismarck Archipelago. A late variety might have been produced there up to 250 BCE. Local styles of Lapita pottery are found in Vanuatu and New Caledonia. Pottery persisted in Fiji, but disappeared completely in other areas of Melanesia and in Siassi.
- In Western Polynesia, Lapita pottery is found from 800 BCE onwards in the Fiji-Samoa-Tonga area. From Tonga and Samoa, Polynesian culture spread to Eastern Polynesia areas including the Marquesas and the Society Islands, and then later to Hawaii, Easter Island, and New Zealand. However, pottery making did not persist in most of Polynesia, mainly due to the lack of suitable clay on small islands.

### ***mana***

- In Polynesian culture *mana* is considered to have a supernatural origin as a sacred impersonal force that exists in the universe. To have *mana* is to have influence and authority, and efficacy, i.e. the power to perform in a given situation. This essential quality of *mana* is not limited to persons – peoples, governments, places and inanimate objects can also possess *mana*.

In Hawaii, *mana loa* means "great power". There are two ways to obtain *mana*: through birth and through warfare. People or objects that possess *mana* are accorded "respect"; because their possession of *mana* gives them "authority", "power", and "prestige".

Among the M ori of New Zealand, a tribe that has *mana whenua* is considered to have demonstrated their authority over a given piece of land or territory. The word's meaning is complex because *mana* is a basic foundation of the Polynesian worldview.

- Melanesian *mana* can be found in people, animals, plants and objects. Similar to the idea of efficacy, or sometimes better known as “luck,” the Melanesians believe that all success can be traced back to *mana*. One could acquire or manipulate this luck in different ways, for example through magic. Certain objects, such as charms or amulets that have *mana* can change a person’s luck. For instance if a very prosperous hunter had a charm containing *mana*, he might give it to another person in the belief that the prosperity of the original owner might be transferred.

## **M ori**

The M ori are the indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand.

- This group probably arrived in southwestern Polynesia in several waves some time before 1300, settling the islands and developing a distinct culture.
- M ori oral history describes the arrival of ancestors from *Hawaiki* (a mythical homeland in tropical Polynesia) in large ocean-going canoes. Migration accounts vary among tribes.
- Europeans arrived in New Zealand in increasing numbers from the late 18th century. The weapon technologies and diseases they introduced destabilized M ori society. By 1840, the M ori lost much of their land and went into a cultural and numerical decline. Their population began to increase again from the late 19th century with a cultural revival began in the 1960s.

**Melanesia** (a geographic and cultural region of the Pacific) [from Greek - *black* + *island*, literally meaning "islands of the black-skinned people", a term was first used by Jules Dumont d'Urville in 1832 to denote an ethnic and geographical grouping of islands distinct from Polynesia and Micronesia.]

- An Oceanic culture and geographic area which includes New Guinea, New Britain, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu (New Hebrides), New Caledonia.
- The Melanesians tend to have dark skin and tightly curled hair. The original inhabitants of the group of islands are likely the ancestors of the present-day Papuan-speaking people. They appear to have occupied these islands as far east as the main islands in the Solomon Islands, including Makira and possibly the smaller islands farther to the east.
- Probably around 4,000 years ago, along the north coast of New Guinea, and in the islands north and east of New Guinea, the Austronesian people came into contact with the pre-existing populations of Papuan-speaking peoples. There was probably a long period of interaction that resulted in many complex changes in genetics, languages, and culture.

**Micronesia** [The name *Micronesia* derives from the Greek *mikros* meaning *small*, and *nesos*, meaning *island*. The term was first proposed to distinguish the region in 1831 by Jules Dumont d'Urville.]

- Micronesia is an Oceanic culture area which includes the island groups of Palau, the Mariannas, the Carolines, Marshall Islands, the Gilbert Islands.
- Geographically this includes atolls with few natural resources, that are linked in trade and reciprocity with other islands.
- Linguistically, these groups speak many dialects belonging to the Austronesian language group.
- Micronesian societies have a long history of cultural creativity and self-sufficiency. They have experienced 500 years of colonial control from the Spanish, Germans, Japanese, and since the Second World War, the United States.
- Culturally the people are a blend of Polynesian with some Melanesian characteristics.

## **pandanus**

Pandanus (*Pandanaceae*) is also called “Screw Pine,” and typically has slender palm-like stems. Prop-roots emanate from the trunks. Stems and terminal crowns of sword-like leaves, give the plants a distinctive appearance. The fruit of this tree can be eaten raw or cooked, and is a major source of food in Micronesia, especially in the atolls. The fibrous nature of the fruit also serves as a natural dental floss.

The tree's leaves are often used as flavoring for sweet dishes such as *kaya jam*, and are also said to have medicinal properties. Leaves were used by the Polynesians to make baskets, mats, outrigger canoe sails, thatch roofs, and grass skirts.

### **Polynesia / Polynesian culture** [(from Greek -"polus" many + "n sos" - island)

- Polynesia is defined as a cultural area of Oceania that can be divided into two primary regions:  
Western Polynesia which includes Uvea, Futura, Samoa, Tonga, Niue, Tongareva and Tuvulu.  
Eastern [also called Central Polynesia which includes Hawaii, the Cook, Australia and Society Islands, the Marquesas, Easter Island, and New Zealand.
- Primary cultural traits of these societies include:  
Bark-cloth manufacture.  
Elaborate architecture featuring open-air temples and houses.  
Canoe-building technology.  
A complex religion and religious structures.  
Horticulture (taro, sweet potatoes, yams, bread fruit, coconuts, and bananas).  
Hunting, fishing, and the domestication of pigs.  
A complex social stratification.  
Chieftdoms rulers by leaders descended from ancestor/gods.  
A priestly class

### **sago**

- Sago is a starch extracted from the pith of sago palm stems, *Metroxylon sagu*. It is a major staple food for the lowland peoples of New Guinea and the Moluccas, where it is called *saksak* and *sagu*. It is traditionally cooked and eaten in various forms, such as rolled into balls, mixed with boiling water to form a paste, or as a pancake.
- Sago looks like many other starches, and both sago and tapioca are produced commercially in the form of "pearls". Sago pearls are similar in appearance to tapioca pearls, and the two may be used interchangeably in some dishes. This similarity causes some confusion in the names of dishes made with the pearls.

### **Sepik River** [pronounced "see-pick"]

- Sepik River is the longest river on the island of New Guinea. The majority of the river flows through the Papua New Guinea provinces of Sandaun and East Sepik, with a small section flowing through the Indonesian province of Papua.
- As one of the great river systems of the world, Sepik River has a large catchment area and landforms that include swamplands, tropical rainforests and mountains. Biologically, the river system is possibly the largest uncontaminated freshwater wetland system in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The river has formed the basis for food, transport and culture.
- The tribes who have lived along the river for many millennia are noted for their magnificent carvings and elaborate manhood initiation ceremonies involving scarification of designs of a crocodile on a riverbank. Many tribes use *garamut* drums in rituals, which are long, hollowed-out tree trunks carved into the shape of various totem animals.

### **tiki**

In Polynesian myth, Tiki is the first man, created by either *Tu Matauenga* or *Tane*. He found the first woman, *Marikoriko*, in a pond. She seduced him and he became the father of *Hine-Kau-Ataata*. Also in Polynesia, a *tiki* or *hei tiki* is a type of sculpture in the shape of a god. Each tiki houses a spirit. The creation of tikis is common all over Polynesia.

## SUPPLEMENTARY ENRICHMENT\*



Baining Fire Dance Mask, 20th century  
Baining people, Gazelle Peninsula, East New Britain Province  
Papua New Guinea, Melanesia  
Bark cloth, bamboo cane, paint, raffia and feather  
49 3/4 x 30 5/8 x 26 1/2 “

### Reading

Flannery, Tim, *Thrown Way Leg: Tree Kangaroos, Possums and Penis Gourds*. Atlantic Monthly Press, New York: 1998.

Jones, Lloyd, *Mister Pip: A Novel*. Dial Press, New York: 2006.

Knauft, Bruce, *The Gebusi: Lives Transformed in a Rainforest World*. McGraw Hill, Boston: 2005.

Matthiessen, Peter, *Under the Mountain Wall: A Chronicle of Two Seasons in Stone Age Guinea*. Penguin, New York: 1962.

Schneebaum, Tobias, *Where Spirits Dwell: An Odessey in the Jungle of New Guinea*. Grove Press, New York: 1988.

### Video

Disappearing World Series, *The Kawelka of Paua New Guinea: Ongka's Big Moka*. Produced and Directed by Charles Naira, Granada Productions: 1974. Ongka, a leader of New Guinea's Kawelka tribe, prepares to give away his possessions in a ceremony called a *Moka*.

### Websites

Art-Pacific at <http://www.art-pacific.com/>

---

\* All the above are available for check-out in the Bowers Docent Library, and are intended to complement the Bibliography in docent materials for *Where Masks Still Dance*, p. 36.