

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ARTS OF THE SOUTH SEAS OPENS AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

A gigantic head 11 feet high, 6 feet wide, 4 feet thick will greet the visitor to Arts of the South Seas opening at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, Wednesday, January 30. This head, a replica of one of the huge stone sculptures on Easter Island, was too large to be taken by elevator or stairs to the second floor of the Museum where in gallery after gallery 400 strange and fantastic objects are on view. Eighteen months in preparation, the exhibition will close at the Museum May 19, after which certain sections of it may be circulated about the country.

The exhibition has been directed by René d'Harnoncourt, Director of the Museum's Department of Manual Industry, in collaboration with Dr. Ralph Linton, Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University, and Dr. Paul S. Wingert, Instructor in the Department of History of Art at Columbia University. The noted Mexican painter, Miguel Covarrubias, and the distinguished Australian ethnologist, Charles P. Mountford, also contributed generously of their time and knowledge.

Arts of the South Seas embraces many of the islands made poignantly familiar through the war years: Guadalcanal, Bougainville in the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, Truk, New Britain--particularly the section of Raboul--the Gilbert and Caroline Islands, and the Marianas. Objects to be shown include sculpture in stone, jade, bone and wood, stamped and painted fabrics made of bark cloth and fibre, jewelry made of shell and turtle shell, carved details of ceremonial houses or temples, canoe ornaments, weapons, masks, large idols and ancestral figures. Jewelry, weapons and masks also make use of human hair, human, shark, rat and whale teeth, and boars' tusks.

The Museum will publish a book of the same title, with 200 illustrations (4 in full color) of objects shown. Its 200 pages will be much more than a catalog of the exhibition. With text by Dr. Linton and Dr. Wingert in collaboration with Mr. d'Harnoncourt, it will be the first publication giving a representative picture of the art styles and the background of the entire region known as Oceania.

In his foreword to the book, Mr. d'Harnoncourt writes in part:

"In spite of its variety and beauty, Oceanic art is still relatively unknown. Anthropologists have of course dealt with many of its regional and local manifestations but have treated them chiefly as a source of useful evidence in their studies of other aspects of native life. Only a few artists and art lovers, most of them associated with advanced movements, have recognized its full esthetic value. The kinship between arts of the South Seas and recent movements in modern art such as Expressionism and Surrealism is similar to that between African Negro art and Cubism so much discussed early in this century.

"The appreciation of foreign art forms by an art group is always connected with the group's own preoccupations. It is significant, therefore, that Oceanic art was among the last of the primitive arts to be 'discovered.' The Cubists, in their search for the basic geometric forms underlying the complex shapes of nature, turned to African Negro art. The reviving interest of modern sculptors in direct carving and their emphasis on actual volume without recourse to 'painting' with light and shade, led to a new appreciation of the ancient sculptures of Mexico and Asia Minor. More recently, the interest in the dream world and the subconscious that first developed during the later phases of Expressionism, made us aware of the Magic art from Oceania. The affinity of this Magic art with certain contemporary movements is not limited to concept and style but can be observed also in the choice of materials and in technique."

The presentation of the arts of the South Sea islands involved a number of specific problems. The area includes great variations in natural surroundings from dark, tropical rain forests to sun-baked atolls. Since in all so-called primitive societies objects are made to fit the locale in which they are to be seen, it was essential for their adequate display to give consideration to the natural characteristics of the various islands such as color, light, spaciousness.

There are at least twenty distinct cultural areas in Oceania, every one of which is closely related to one or more of the others. Cultural characteristics and art styles extend from region to region so that a traditional presentation in closed exhibition units would have given a completely false picture. The plan of the exhibition, therefore, has been designed to show the visitor open vistas from one section to another wherever there is a close relationship between the objects. Closed units are introduced only where unique local styles have developed.

It is the aim of the installation to present the objects to the visitor in an atmosphere closely related to that for which they were created and to recreate the experiences of the traveller who, in going from country to country, witnesses the sharp contrasts between, as well as the gradual merging of cultures.

The necessary research and experimentation to apply this new display method was made possible through a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

Lenders to the exhibition of Arts of the South Seas include American Museum of Natural History, New York; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Buffalo Museum of Science; Chicago Natural History Museum; Milwaukee Public Museum, Wisconsin; Newark Museum, New Jersey; New York Historical Society; Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge; Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, New Haven; Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts; Philadelphia Commercial Museum; Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence; Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; South Australian Museum, Adelaide; United States National Museum, Washington, D. C.; University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia; Washington University, St. Louis; also Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Bolitho; Lt. John Burke, U.S.N.R.; Max Ernst; John Ferno; Capt. Sheldon A. Jacobson, U.S.N.R.; Mrs. Harold Florsheim; L. Pierre Ledoux; Prof. Ralph Linton; Miss M. Matthews; Charles P. Mountford; Dillon Ripley; Dr. V. G. Simkhovitch; John and Margaret Vandercook; John Wise.

To quote further from Mr. d'Harnoncourt's introduction to the book Arts of the South Seas:

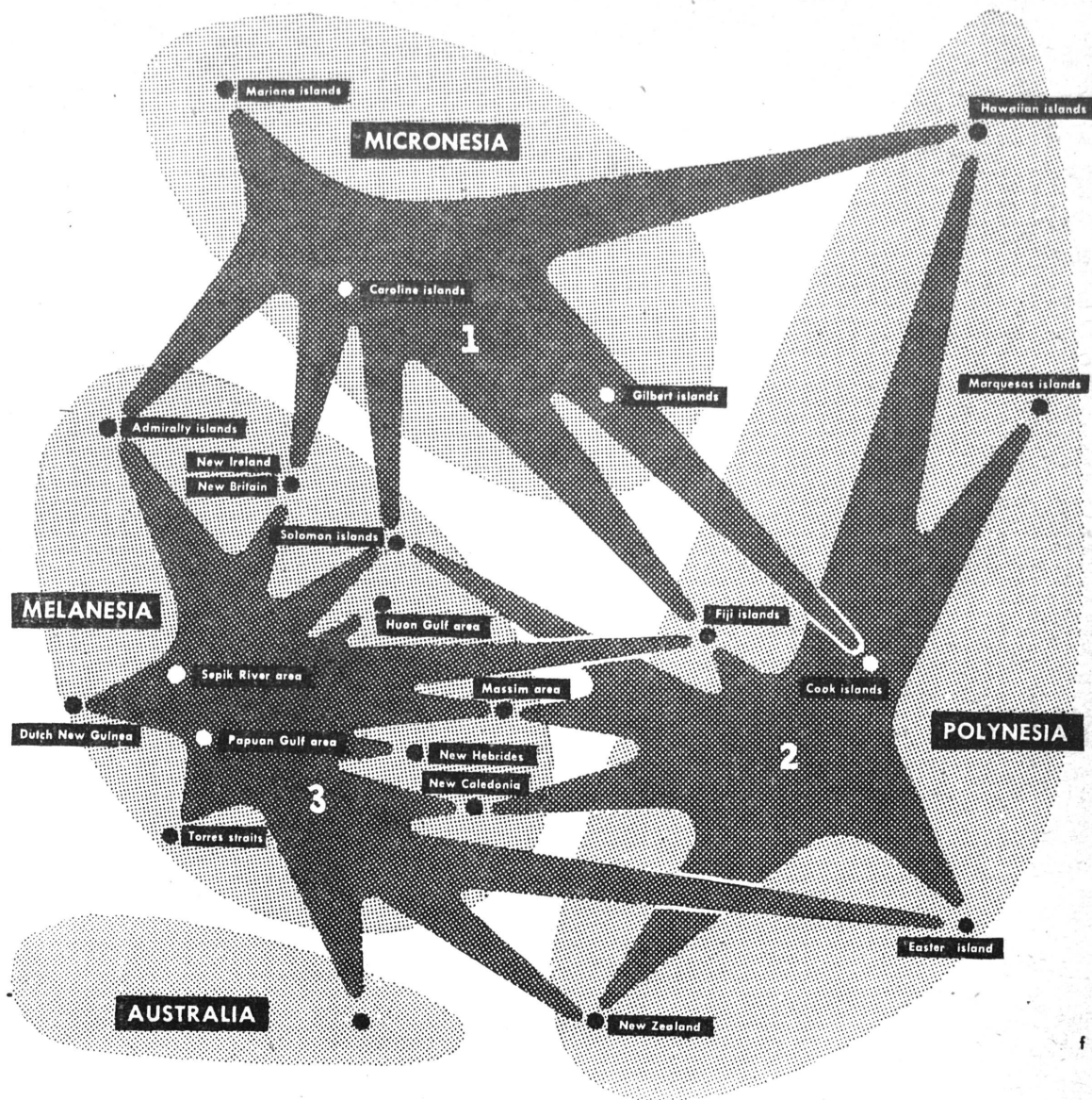
"For three centuries the distant islands of the South Seas have held a strange fascination for the Western World. The tales of early explorers and adventurers, often edited by romantic stay-at-homes, made us think of a perilous paradise inhabited by picturesque children of nature. But recent reports from the men stationed in the Pacific theatre of war struck a grimmer note. These men learned to know the islands the hard way--fighting and sweating it out in the suffocating heat of the damp jungles and in the desolation of god-forsaken specks of coral lost in a vast ocean.

"Seen against these contrasting backgrounds, the arts of the South Seas become a vital document that gives reality and substance to the dreams of the romantics and fills the stories of mud and rock with dramatic human content. Here is a record of the extraordinary achievements of scattered groups of primitive men who conquered the isolation of a vast island world and created in it a series of rich cultures.

"The terms South Seas and Oceania are used in this book to designate the large section of the South Pacific Ocean that includes Australia, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. There is good reason for dealing with this region as a unit since each of its component cultural areas has marked affinities with one or more of the others, so that together they constitute a network of related cultures even though no single important feature is common to all....

"In certain sections racially well defined groups have lived next to each other for generations without losing their cultural identity, while in others they have merged to form new homogeneous groups. In the case of successive migrations of people of the same ancestry, the newcomers were either completely absorbed by the early settlers or formed an aristocracy within a racially uniform people....

"Far too little research has been done up to now to make possible a systematic analysis of Oceanic art based on considerations of content and form, but even a preliminary survey provides many stimulating points of departure. There is no doubt that the great variety of styles and the outstanding quality of individual works of art from the South Seas would make such a study a major contribution to our knowledge of the primitive arts of the world."



1. Natural forms simplified; ornamentation grows out of function and technique.
2. Natural forms geometricized; intricate surface patterns.
3. Natural forms exaggerated and distorted with rhythmic organic curved surfaces.

This chart is based on the character of the objects themselves and does not attempt to show the historic process of distribution of these trends. That each one of them can be most clearly discerned in one major region and appears in less distinct form in the others does not necessarily indicate a radiation of the trend from a center to marginal areas. In some cases it may indicate simply the survival of a widespread tendency in central areas less exposed to other influences.

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ARTS OF THE SOUTH SEAS

(Introduction to Catalog by Rene d'Harnoncourt)

For three centuries the distant islands of the South Seas have held a strange fascination for the Western World. The tales of early explorers and adventurers, often edited by romantic stay-at-homes, made us think of a perilous paradise inhabited by picturesque children of nature. But recent reports from the men stationed in the Pacific theatre of war struck a grimmer note. These men learned to know the islands the hard way--fighting and sweating it out in the suffocating heat of the damp jungles and in the desolation of god-forsaken specks of coral lost in a vast ocean.

Seen against these contrasting backgrounds, the arts of the South Seas become a vital document that gives reality and substance to the dreams of the romantics and fills the stories of mud and rock with dramatic human content. Here is a record of the extraordinary achievements of scattered groups of primitive men who conquered the isolation of a vast island world and created in it a series of rich cultures.

The terms South Seas and Oceania are used in this book to designate the large section of the South Pacific Ocean that includes Australia, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. There is good reason for dealing with this region as a unit since each of its component cultural areas has marked affinities with one or more of the others, so that together they constitute a network of related cultures even though no single important feature is common to all.

The arts of Indonesia are not included here in spite of the fact that among them are found survivals of the old cultures that linked the Pacific islands with the Asiatic mainland. For instance, the sculptures produced on the Island of Letti and those of the Dyaks of Borneo belong to these early art forms and are therefore very closely related to some Oceanic work. Most Indonesian art, however, has been so strongly influenced by the late sophisticated Asiatic court styles that its inclusion as a whole among the arts of the South Seas would be inconsistent.

In spite of its variety and beauty, Oceanic art is still relatively unknown. Anthropologists have of course dealt with many of its regional and local manifestations but have treated them chiefly as a source of useful evidence in their studies of other aspects of native life. Only a few artists and art lovers, most of them associated with advanced movements, have recognized its full esthetic value.

The appreciation of foreign art forms by such a group is always connected with the group's own preoccupations. It is significant, therefore, that Oceanic art was among the last of the primitive arts to be "discovered." The Cubists, in their search for the basic geometric forms underlying the complex shapes of nature, turned to African Negro art. The reviving interest of modern sculptors in direct carving and their emphasis on actual volume without recourse to "painting" with light and shade, led to a new appreciation of the ancient sculptures of Mexico and Asia Minor. More recently, the interest in the dream world and the subconscious that first developed during the later phases of Expressionism made us aware of the Magic art from Oceania. The affinity of this Magic art with certain contemporary movements is not limited to concept and style but can be observed also in the choice of materials and in technique.

Each of these "discoveries" of foreign art styles called for a new method of approach. The solution of formal problems admired in African Negro art can be appreciated in terms of pure esthetics. Yet an understanding of the relationship between content and form in Melanesian sculpture calls for some knowledge of the cultural background of the native artist. The growing realization in our art world that a work of art can best be appreciated in the context of its own civilization, together with the increasing interest in art shown by many scientists,

holds a great promise. The collaboration among these groups should contribute greatly to our knowledge and understanding of the creative potentialities of mankind.

In trying to gain an understanding of Oceanic cultures and the development of their many contrasting components, a survey of the factors that produced them is necessary. The native populations of the entire region are composed of descendants of successive waves of migrants from the Asiatic mainland who belonged to many different racial types and represented various phases of cultural progress. It is generally believed that the ancestors of the aborigines of Australia were very early settlers who remained relatively undisturbed by later migrations. The Papuans of central and western New Guinea may also have come at a very early date but were followed by the ancestors of the Micronesians and Polynesians. The Melanesians originated probably from an early intermixture of Papuans with the later migrants.

In certain sections racially well defined groups have lived next to each other for generations without losing their cultural identity, while in others they have merged to form new homogeneous groups. In the case of successive migrations of people of the same ancestry, the newcomers were either completely absorbed by the early settlers or formed an aristocracy within a racially uniform people.

The great variety of inherited aptitudes and cultural characteristics the immigrants brought with them was further diversified by the climatic conditions and natural resources of the islands on which they settled. In central Australia they found vast deserts and steppes; in the mountains of New Zealand cool pine forests; on the coast of New Guinea dense tropical jungle, and in Micronesia small wind-swept coral atolls with just enough soil to support a few palm trees and patches of scrub. Once the influx of Asiatic migrants ceased, innumerable regional cultures grew out of the adjustment of many distinct groups of people to a great diversity of physical surroundings. These cultures developed undisturbed by influences from outside Oceania, but the constant traffic from island to island made for a wide distribution of regional ideas and art forms.

The division of Oceania into four major regions comprising twenty cultural areas is a convenient device to organize the exceedingly complex material into more or less homogeneous units, and has been adopted as such in this book. A similar organization of the material can be found in many anthropological publications, except that Fiji, usually considered as part of Melanesia, is here included among the island groups of Polynesia. This was done because the art of the Fijians is very closely related to Polynesian work although their languages, cultural characteristics and physical appearance are predominantly Melanesian.

As has been said, there is little uniformity in the scope and content of the various cultural areas. Some of them, like the Huon Gulf, cover only a small section of an island while others, like Central Polynesia, include several archipelagoes. The arts of Easter Island, New Zealand, the Marquesas and the Admiralties show few stylistic variations while those of the Solomons and the Sepik River area of New Guinea can be subdivided into many distinct local styles. In the case of both Australia and Micronesia the entire region was treated as a unit because the available material, in spite of its often considerable esthetic merit, is too limited in its variety to make subdivision practicable.

A careful examination of a representative collection of the arts of the South Seas reveals the existence of a number of basic trends that often extend through many cultural areas and sometimes even cross regional borders. The extreme economy of means, for example, that produces such elegant simplicity in the sculpture and useful objects from Micronesia can also be clearly recognized in some of the Fijian and Central Polynesian work and may even be traced to the islands of northern Melanesia. This trend may well have originated in the scarcity of raw materials on the Micronesian coral atolls which made wasteful elaboration impractical. Its appearance in island groups such as Fiji and Samoa, where natural resources are abundant, suggests that it eventually turned into a style accepted mainly for its esthetic appeal. This is further borne out by the application of its formal characteristics to ceremonial figures that served no utilitarian purpose.

Very pronounced in the arts of Central Polynesia is a preoccupation with geometric order which may well reflect the intricate, systematic structure of social and religious concepts. Many objects are decorated with angular patterns that often cover their entire surface. In some cases, as in the adzes from the Hervey Islands, these patterns are so deeply incised that the adzes can no longer be used as tools and serve only ritual purposes. Such geometric designs have evidently a ritual significance of their own and occasionally become so elaborate that they change the basic shape of an object until it becomes an abstract form. The emphasis on geometric order is less evident but still noticeable in the arts of New Zealand and other marginal regions of Polynesia, where it survives in decorative surface patterns superimposed on organic forms. In Melanesia still another dominant tendency appears. The art of the Sepik River area and the Papuan Gulf of New Guinea, as well as that of some of the other nearby islands, has a strong almost violent emotional quality. This is most apparent in the carved images of ancestor and nature spirits produced in this region. Organic interplay of curved surfaces lends these sculptures life and motion. Distortions and exaggerations and the use of strongly contrasting colors give them an aggressive dramatic intensity. Many of the figures are the work of men initiated into the secrets of ceremonial life and are purposely made to awe the uninitiated members of the tribe. Even if the means employed by the artist to impress his audience are often spectacular, one cannot speak of intentional deception, for the artist believes his work to be filled with the power of the spirits and considers himself their agent and instrument. A combination of showmanship and deep conviction makes this art an ideal vehicle for its magic content.

To what extent this trend has spread outside Melanesia is difficult to ascertain. It is evident, however, that the dramatic intensity of the Easter Island carvings is similar to that of Melanesian sculpture and that the basic forms of Maori carvings resemble in dynamic quality the work from certain sections of New Guinea.

Far too little research has been done up to now to make possible a systematic analysis of Oceanic art based on considerations of content and form, but even a preliminary survey provides many stimulating points of departure. There is no doubt that the great variety of styles and the outstanding quality of individual works of art from the South Seas would make such a study a major contribution to our knowledge of the primitive arts of the world.

ARTS OF THE SOUTH SEAS

Sections of the Exhibition

I AUSTRALIA

II MELANESIA

New Caledonia

New Hebrides

New Guinea - Gulf of Papua

" " - Sepik River Area

" " - Dutch New Guinea

" " - Torres Straits

" " - Massim Area

" " - Huon Gulf

New Britain

New Ireland

Admiralties

Solomon Islands

III MICRONESIA

IV POLYNESIA

Fiji

Central Polynesia

Marquesas

New Zealand

Hawaii

Easter Island

I AUSTRALIA

The dark-skinned aborigines of Australia are believed to be a branch of the Caucasian race and related to the Dravidians of India and the brunette peoples of southern Europe. They are the most primitive group in the South Seas and are in fact closer than any other living people to prehistoric man.

The material culture of the aborigines is very simple and limited to the making of only a few types of weapons, tools and implements. Some of these are decorated with intricate designs of considerable beauty. Australian art frequently represents totemic subjects and includes realistic portrayals as well as abstract symbols.

II MELANESIA

New Caledonia - The New Hebrides

New Caledonia and the New Hebrides are only a few hundred miles apart. Yet they offer the most striking contrasts in natural environment and climatic conditions. New Caledonia has a relatively dry and even climate while the New Hebrides are constantly lashed by tropical storms. New Caledonia is nearly free from geological disturbances while the New Hebrides are almost daily shaken by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

The same contrasts can be found in the life and arts of these two island groups. A well-ordered clan system brought stability to New Caledonian society; a social order calling for constant effort to climb from grade to grade kept the people of the New Hebrides under continuous stress. New Caledonian art is formal and made to endure. Its most important manifestations are carvings that form an intrinsic part of architecture. Most of the art of the New Hebrides is highly emotional and spectacular and made to last only for the duration of one ceremony.

New Guinea - Gulf of Papua

The second largest island in the world, New Guinea is a sub-continent whose inhabitants number over one million. They are divided into three major racial groups: Papuans, Melanesians, and Negritos.

The material culture of the Negritos is so simple that their work has not been included in this exhibition. The six cultural areas represented here, occupied by Papuans and Melanesians, are the Gulf of Papua, the Sepik River Area, Dutch New Guinea, the Torres Straits, the Huon Gulf, and the Massim Area. Between these areas lie vast unexplored regions that may, once they are known, contribute to the variety of New Guinea art.

The Gulf of Papua includes the humid shores of the island from the Fly River east to the Massim area. The people of this region live in communistic societies and produce a rich dramatic art used in spectacular communal ceremonies. In spite of linguistic and cultural differences that divide the people into two distinct groups, the art of the Papuan Gulf is relatively uniform and the only one in New Guinea that is essentially a painter's rather than a sculptor's art.

The importance of ceremonials in the Papuan Gulf area is so great that the economic life of the people and their entire production of artifacts are influenced by them. The ceremonial cycles of the eastern group, for example, last from five to twenty years, beginning with the construction of men's clubhouses which are frequently several hundred feet long with front gables over fifty feet high. In these clubhouses bark-cloth masks and other ceremonial objects are prepared. Many taboos and a complicated ritual go into this time-consuming work. When at last the masked figures representing different spirits emerge dramatically from the clubhouse, the entire community is at hand to witness the spectacle and to participate in the subsequent dances and processions. At the conclusion of the cycle the clubhouse is deserted and the elaborate, spectacular masks are destroyed.

The Sepik River Area

A great variety of cultures and art styles and many different languages are found among the dozens of tribes inhabiting the Sepik River area. Interchange of objects and ideas between tribes is so active that in many places it is difficult to distinguish the local from the imported styles. Transplanted objects often acquire a meaning and use entirely different from those intended by the people who made them originally. A flute, for instance, may in one village be sacred and associated with a specific mythological being, while in a nearby village the same type of flute will be a secular object with no particular meaning. In fact, a whole group of carved and painted objects used for a dance, and the right to the dance itself, are sometimes "bought" by a neighboring or distant tribe so that the ceremonial life of these people changes constantly.

Many Sepik River carvings are part of the sacred equipment of the men's societies in charge of the ceremonies and can be seen only by those men who have undergone initiation. Unlike the Papuan Gulf communal ceremonies, a marked distinction is drawn here between spectators and performers. Women and children make up the audience who witness the public spectacles, and gather outside the men's clubhouses when hidden rites are being performed.

Dutch New Guinea

Dutch New Guinea covers almost the entire western half of the vast island of New Guinea. Although many regions are only partially explored, it is obvious that the Indonesian islands nearby to the west contributed many elements to the more advanced cultures of the negroid peoples inhabiting this enormous area. The arts of the north, west, and southwest coasts have marked affinities with Indonesian art, especially with that of Sumatra and Borneo. This is particularly apparent in the frequent use of pierced scrollwork and in the manner in which human and bird forms are stylized.

The Torres Straits

The most important objects made on the islands of the Torres Straits are masks and elaborately carved arrow points. Most of the known masks of the region, aside from a few wooden ones, are made of tortoise shell.

The carvings on nearly all arrows depict either a man or a crocodile. These images are, however, often so highly stylized that they are difficult to recognize.

The Massim Area

The Massim area includes the eastern shore of New Guinea and the nearby archipelagoes: the Trobriands, d'Entrecasteaux, Louisiade, Woodlark and others. The inhabitants are a mixture of Papuan and Melanesian, as in most parts of New Guinea, but the Melanesian element is especially strong here. The people are skilful truck farmers who live in well-ordered villages.

No great spectacular ceremonies like those of the Sepik River and Papuan Gulf areas are performed in this region. Massim art - delicate, decorative, and controlled - has a closer relationship to such marginal areas of Melanesia as the Solomons than to the rest of New Guinea, and also has marked affinities with work from New Zealand.

In spite of the fact that Massim art seems less emotional than that of many other regions of Melanesia, its production, like all other activities in the area, is strictly regulated by magic practices.

The Huon Gulf

The shores of the Huon Gulf are separated from the interior of New Guinea by almost impassable jungles and tropical swamps. Due to this isolation the art of the people of this region is but little affected by contacts with other New Guinea groups but frequently shows Indonesian influences.

Though the number of design motifs used in Huon Gulf art is limited, they occur in endless variations that give it considerable richness within the scope of a well-defined style.

New Britain

Since New Britain is among the least known islands in Melanesia, very little data on its material culture is available. Wood carvings, such as the monumental "helmet" mask and the mask modeled over a skull shown here, are closely related to the work of New Ireland. They also have affinities with sculpture from the New Hebrides and some sections of New Guinea.

The most spectacular developments in New Britain art are the ~~XXXX~~ grotesque masks made for the ceremonies of the secret societies of the Baining and Sulka tribes, who live on the Gazelle Peninsula in the extreme north of the island. The secret societies have great influence in tribal affairs and control the relationship between man and the spirit world. They maintain such secrecy that an uninitiated person who recognizes the wearer of a mask or, in some cases, even sees the masks, is punished by death.

New Ireland

The art of New Ireland reached its apex in objects made for the mortuary ceremonies (malagan) held in honor of the clan dead and of legendary ancestors. Social prestige depended largely on the lavishness with which these ceremonies were staged. Competition therefore was keen, and this led to "bigger and better" rituals; quantities of food were collected for communal feasting, and many new ceremonial objects were carved and painted. On these objects clan designs, representing the various clan ancestors symbolically, were interwoven with other traditional designs of a purely decorative nature. The primary concern of the artist, who was a professional working under the direction of the clan leaders, was to recombine the old designs into new patterns. This produced a virtuosity or showmanship on his part which contributed to the development of a rich, complicated art, one of the most distinctive of Oceania.

The Admiralty Islands

The art of the Admiralty Islands, like that of the Solomon Islands, has great severity, dignity, and simplicity. In this it recalls somewhat the carved figures from Micronesia.

The people are divided into two distinct groups: the agriculturists living in the interior, and the fishermen of the coast. These groups are highly dependent on a regular exchange of their produce. Many of the islands have developed specialized industries such as the making of bowls, spears, beds, etc., and these products are traded throughout the archipelago. In spite of this specialization, the art style of the Admiralty Islands is almost uniform.

The Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islanders were daring head hunters. This practice influenced both the social and religious aspect of life in this region. Constantly facing danger, they took recourse in a belief in powerful spirits whose protection they invoked again and again.

Many of the carved images from the Solomons, such as the figures attached to boat prows, are representations of these spirits.

In contrast to the art of the Admiralty Islands, the art of the Solomons shows many distinct regional styles.

III MICRONESIA

Micronesia is a region of scattered atolls and volcanic islands. It has few natural resources, not even enough soil for gardening. Metallic ores and stone hard enough for tools and weapons are lacking; adzes and chisels were ground from giant clam shells. Wood was scarce, but with what they had the Micronesians made fine canoes and built good houses. They were skilled navigators and there was much travel and trade between the islands.

The population was divided into clans, each of which had a definite territory, an hereditary chief; and a distinct social status. There were noble clans, common clans, and, in some places, servile clans who were almost in a slave status. The nobles enjoyed prestige and privilege and wore special costumes. Although the social organization was complex, the religion was simple. There were no temples, images or priests. There was a mythology and a series of clan deities, but no elaborate ritual.

Since living was hard, the Micronesians never developed elaborate decorative arts, but found their esthetic expression in fine craftsmanship and simple, functional design.

IV POLYNESIA

The Fiji Islands

The Fijis, large islands, well timbered and with good soil, form a link between the Melanesian and Polynesian groups. Fijian culture presents a fusion of both Melanesian and Polynesian elements. The language is Melanesian; most of the art forms Polynesian in origin; the social organization is a mixture of both. In physical type the Fijians are unique, having very dark skins and stiff kinky hair.

The Fijis were ruled by hereditary tribal chieftains. The tribes were divided into clans and the strict rules governing intermarriage between clan members resulted in considerable inbreeding. The position of women was low and polygyny was the rule, the chief often having as many as twenty wives. Religious worship centered in the clan deities, usually deified chiefs, each of whom had his own temple and priest. The Fijians were fighting most of the time, but their wars were not very deadly. They fought with elaborately decorated clubs and long, impressive, but unwieldy spears. Slain enemies and captives were eaten by the victorious group.

Although the Fijians made sailing canoes capable of carrying a crew of 200 men, they were timid navigators. Their art forms, except for the elaborately carved war clubs of the men and the decorated bark cloth of the women, were mainly simple and functional.

Central Polynesia

Polynesian culture reached its highest development in this line of island groups extending east and west from Tonga to the Tuamotos. The people of the western and eastern groups differ from each other both in culture and in physical type.

The westernmost islands, Tonga and Samoa, produced very similar art styles but entirely dissimilar social organizations. The Tongans were daring navigators and determined fighters, united under a single king with autocratic powers. They had little concern for the supernatural, maintained no priests or temples. The Samoans, likewise, were indifferent to religion, but instead of war they concentrated on politics. Each village had its fono, or council, with memberships of graded rank. Though the highest offices were held by the hereditary chiefs, an ambitious young man could rise to important posts. The art objects of Samoa, instead of being of a religious or utilitarian nature as in the rest of Polynesia, were designed for social use at the fonos.

The eastern islands of Central Polynesia were ruled by an hereditary king who was the chief of the dominant clan to which all the other clans paid tribute. Here religion was highly developed with innumerable gods of various rank. There were gods of the crafts, the clan deities, and the national deities for whom great sacred places were built, whose priests were of the royal blood and who were appeased by human sacrifices. The artistic expression was here centered in the decoration of the cult objects.

The Marquesas Islands

The Marquesas Islands are rugged and mountainous and subject to drought, which made living so hard that the labor of several men was required to support a household. The Marquesans are a handsome people and feminine beauty was prized since a good-looking girl could attract many husbands and bring wealth to the family line.

The people lived in small tribes, each of which was habitually at war with its neighbors. They were cannibals, frequently raiding other tribes just for the meat, or for human sacrifices to their tribal gods.

The Marquesans were skilled in quarrying and stone construction and excelled in the decorative arts, particularly tattooing and carving in wood and stone. There were master craftsmen, but all the men were proficient at carving and all the men's manufactures were elaborately decorated. The women's crafts were limited to the making of simple undecorated mats and baskets since sexual matters absorbed of necessity a great deal of their time.

Marquesan art is notable for its frequent use of the human figure, or human face, introduced as part of a balanced, overall design.

New Zealand

New Zealand was explored by Polynesian voyagers in 900 A.D. but the great migration occurred in the thirteenth century. These immigrants from the small, poor islands of Central Polynesia found themselves in a rich, wide land, but one with a colder and damper climate than any they had known. They had to cultivate new crops, build more substantial houses, and replace their bark cloth garments with heavy cloaks made of New Zealand flax.

The Maori, as the New Zealanders were called, were the most warlike of the Polynesians. They built strong fortifications and worked out patterns of strategic warfare.

They were excellent artists, their art motifs showing a strong derivation from the Marquesan. Like the Marquesans, they excelled in tattooing and carvings in wood and in the fine New Zealand jade. Unlike most primitive groups, the Maori had two quite distinct art forms. Robes, baskets, and mats, made by the women, were decorated with angular, geometric designs while wood carving, rafters painting, and tattooing, the men's arts, employed curvilinear design. The patterns were intricate and had great subtlety, and many Maori carvings rank with the art masterpieces of the world.

Hawaii

Hawaii was settled first by voyagers from eastern Micronesia, but in the thirteenth century a wave of migrants from Central Polynesia subjugated the earlier settlers and established a distinct culture of Central Polynesian derivation. The outstanding feature of this culture was its high development of aristocratic patterns and political organization. The usual pattern of tribal organization was replaced by a feudal system in which the bulk of the people were vassals rendering service and paying tribute to the kings and nobles. Under such a system the esthetic expression was naturally concentrated on luxury objects.

Hawaii (continued)

Religion was also the province of the nobles and priests, with the common people allowed to enter only the non-sacred part of the temples. The worship of Ku, the War God, was the state religion, but there were many gods and many temples which housed images of the deities. Some of these images were simple and naturalistic, but the most characteristic were highly conventionalized figures with disproportionally large heads, elongated eyes and fantastic headdresses.

The Hawaiians made the finest bark cloth in Oceania, and for ceremonies and battles the chiefs wore marvelous feather cloaks. The food bowls of the nobles were decorated with small human figures, carved in the round, but the proletariat had only simple, undecorated objects.

Easter Island

Easter Island was probably populated by travellers from the Marquesas, who could roam no more once they had settled there as there was no wood on the island for canoe making. Social organization followed Polynesian patterns with clans presided over by a king, whose functions were mainly religious. The chief god was Makemake, who was associated with the sooty tern. The man who obtained the first tern egg in the nesting season became for one year the incarnation of the god, lived in a special house and received food offerings from the people.

Wood was highly prized material on Easter. Small bits of hard wood were carved into grotesque human figures and worn as jewelry. The larger wooden images had religious significance and were also a symbol of the owner's wealth and standing in the community.

The most publicized aspect of Easter Island art is the great stone images, some of which weigh up to thirty tons and are sixty feet long. These were cut from soft tufa quarried from the crater of an extinct volcano. Another unique feature is the script which is incised on wooden tablets. These have never been successfully interpreted, as the characters are pictographs designed as a memory aid and not formal writing; but the Easter Islanders were the only people of Oceania to develop any sort of writing.

The present natives can give little information about the stone images or the script for, in 1862, the king of Easter and all the learned men were carried off by Peruvian slave raiders so that most of the legend and history of the island have been forgotten.