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New Guinea Art: Masterpieces of the Jolika Collection

John Friede, Greg Hodgins, Philippe Peltier

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The appeal of New Guinea's art lies in the people's extraordinary resourcefulness and creativity. For centuries, they have made objects in order to communicate with the spirit world. Many pieces, based on myths and ancient religious themes, stand comparison with the world's great sculptural masterpieces. Some were made in response to health, fertility or rites of passage; others signified individual stature in a village, invoked the end of a mourning ritual, or warded off evil and sickness. Everyday objects were just as carefully crafted, including house posts, dishes, canoes or shields. The range of media reflects the natural resources available to the New Guinean: shell, rock, feathers, bone, wood, bark, cloth, sago-leaf, nuts and seeds, human hair, and brilliant colours from natural pigments. Although these objects were never intended to last beyond their immediate function, they have in fact survived for hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years. The arts of New Guinea have been little known to Western audiences for centuries, partly for geographical reasons. New Guinea is a remote island the size of France and Italy combined, just east of Indonesia and north of Australia in the South Pacific. The terrain is mountainous with coastal lowlands, and the climate is aggressively humid and prone to monsoon rains. Almost a thousand languages are spoken on the island, and it is home to a variety of distinct cultures and art styles. This elegantly presented two-volume publication depicts the art of New Guinea in richer detail than ever before. It is a detailed and broad-based survey, drawn from the Jolika Collection of John and Marcia Friede - the world's foremost private collection. Volume I contains the lavish selection of magnificent colour plates. Volume II features three essays by noted scholars and an extensive, illustrated catalogue section by John Friede. Publication will coincide with the reopening in autumn 2005 of the newly renovated de Young Museum in San Francisco, an institution with a strong commitment to the arts of the South Pacific. With John and Marcia Friede's generous gift of the collection, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco will become the United State's leading centre for the study and preservation of New Guinea's art.

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