



...the e-newsletter of the Ethnic Arts Council

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Filling the Tribal Void

“Art of the Pacific” opens at LACMA

EAC e-news talked to Nancy Thomas, Deputy Director, LACMA, Art Administration and Collections, who has just curated the new exhibition of LACMA’s collection of Pacific Island art¹.

Q: LACMA’s CEO and Director Michael Govan has frequently stated his vision to build LACMA into a true “House of Cultures”, with an emphasis on the art that lies geographically to the south or to the west of California. There are still a few blank spots on LACMA’s cultural art map. How does the acquisition of Oceanic art from the Masco Collection fit into LACMA’s ambitious strategy?

A: As Michael Govan describes, the acquisition of the Masco Collection is part of the museum’s ongoing initiative to collect art from underrepresented regions of the world and to consider it within the context of the museum’s vast encyclopedic collection. The extraordinary works in this collection, with their broad range of geographic distribution, exceptionally high level of quality, and distinguished collection histories represented an ideal opportunity to jump start a significant collection for LACMA.

Q: Could you tell us a bit of the history and quality of the Masco collection? And describe a few of its highlights?

A: The collection was put together by Richard Manoogian, chairman of the Masco Corporation, over the course of several decades, with a core of material assembled by Wayne Heathcote². A number of objects came from key public sales, such as the collections of James Hooper and George Ortiz, both sold in the 1970s. Various scholars were involved with the exhibition and



¹ For the development of the “Art of the Pacific” project, Nancy Thomas worked with **Christina Hellmich** (Curator of Oceanic Art and The Jolika Papua New Guinea Collection, de Young Museum, San Francisco) as an advisor, along with UC graduate student **Mariah Briel**, who contributed text that will be posted as extended label copy on LACMA’s website. In addition to Austrian artists **Franz West** and **Andreas Reiter Raabe**, LACMA’s **Victoria Behner** contributed to the design of the installation. [Info by LACMA]

² **Wayne Heathcote** is a noted collector and dealer of tribal art who has helped build important collections, like the Jolika New Guinea Art collection, on view at the de Young Museum, San Francisco. Heathcote got interested in Oceanic art as an Australian patrol officer on the Sepik River in post-WWII Papua New Guinea. [Info by e-news]



documentation of the collection, such as Detroit curator, Michael Kan, and Masco collection curator, Ellen Taubman, and art of the Pacific scholar, Allen Wardwell³. Some of the highlights comprise an important drum (*pahu*) [image below] and two shark tooth implements (*palau papanihomano*) collected in Hawaii, by Captain James Cook during the third expedition of 1778, a *moai kavakava* (male ancestor figure), and a *rapa* (dance paddle) [image, top of page 3] from Easter Island, a striking New Ireland *Uli* (hermaphrodite ancestor figure) [image detail, bottom of page 3], and an important Solomon Island shield. Forty-six objects were purchased by LACMA, and in addition the Masco Corporation Foundation is in the process of giving several additional objects to LACMA, including a highly important *Staff God* from the Cook Island of Mangaia, collected by the London Missionary Society⁴ in 1823.

The provenance history of the objects is quite varied, for example, the Hawaiian objects were originally in the collection of the Leverian Museum⁵, London. A number of works, such as the important *Uli*, a *House Mask* from the Caroline Islands, the *Dance Headdress* from the Sulka People of New Britain, and the Solomon Islands *Shield*, were collected in the late 19th or early 20th centuries and later de-accessioned by German museums⁶. Other objects from notable collections include a magnificent Torres Strait *Hand Drum* (warup) that belonged to Romanian-born poet and founder of the dada movement, Tristan Tzara, after his move to Paris in 1919.

Q: *Earlier this year, you had orchestrated a workshop with a few noted scholars and curators participating on how to successfully exhibit tribal art. Quite a few EAC members were in the interested audience. For the Oceanic exhibit, how did you deal with the challenge to do justice to the art's ethnographic and historic context, and at the same time celebrate its very own creativity and relevance?*



³ Allen Wardwell, *Island Ancestors, Oceanic Art from the Masco Collection*, University of Washington Press, 1994

⁴ Formed in 1795, the hugely influential **London Missionary Society** operated (non-denominational) missions in the Pacific Islands, Africa, India, and China. One of the Society's most famous sons was David Livingstone (*yes, the "Doctor Livingstone, I presume"*) who went to South Africa in 1840. [Info by e-news]

⁵ The **Leverian Museum** (aka the **Holophusikon**) was a museum of natural curiosities, exhibited at Leicester House, London, from 1775 to 1786. When owner Ashton Lever offered the collection for sale, there were no takers. Among others, the British Museum and Catherine II (the Great) of Russia refused. The collection as a whole was raffled off. In 1806, raffle winner James Parkinson (**not** the famous doctor) sold the collection in pieces at auction. Buyers included the Imperial Museum of Vienna, as well as several early British collectors. [Info by e-news]

⁶ Among them, the **Uebersee Museum, Bremen** and the **Linden Museum, Stuttgart**. [info by e-news]



A: This installation will be the first in an ongoing series of projects featuring LACMA’s Art of the Pacific collection. With this first project, one of the intentions was to bring the eye of LACMA’s viewing audience to see that these are extremely sophisticated works of art and to take a hard look at the individual objects.

Artist Franz West recognized that many of the works were created within a natural environment and not intended for viewing or display within “machined cases” with rigid pedestals and square vitrines. He asked his fellow artist and colleague, Andreas Reiter Raabe, to come to Los Angeles to execute part of the plan, a subtle wall wash of mate tea, which serves as a pale backdrop for the objects. As Franz West conceived the plan, the wash of tea would provide a subtle background for the works as well as being an indirect reference to the early tea trade which brought voyagers across the Pacific during the 17th century.

We proposed an arrangement of objects within the gallery, organized geographically to follow the general migration of island peoples from New Guinea throughout the Pacific Islands and finally colonizing New Zealand. This allowed us not only to follow the path of history, but to



arrange the works in geographic areas which generally have some formal resonance. Visitors will find this particularly evident in the area of New Ireland, where we grouped a number of objects, each with a similar visual vocabulary.

While the desire was to keep the gallery visually calm, there is also an interest at LACMA about providing more history on the objects themselves. In this case, extended gallery chat labels are accessible on the LACMA website (or even on mobile phones within the galleries, if visitors want to access more information immediately). Additional research is currently underway to collect more detail on each object, and extended entries, the equivalent of new catalogue entries will be posted on the LACMA website, once they are completed.

Q: LACMA has a record of involving contemporary artists and designers in the installation of its exhibitions. John Baldessari designed “Magritte”, Jorge Pardo the pre-Columbian galleries. For the Oceanic exhibit you enlisted Austrian artist Franz West. What was the thinking behind that choice, and what can the visitor expect?

A: Part of the decision involved Franz West’s interest in providing gallery seating and his personal interest in the Art of the Pacific, as he was quite familiar with major collections in Europe. Andreas Reiter Raabe also had a strong familiarity with the region, working extensively in Australia and New Zealand, and traveling to Vanuatu and other sites within the Pacific Islands.



Visitors can look forward to seeing pedestals that have an informal quality, designed according to a prototype provided by Franz West, but executed by LACMA’s carpenters (some of whom are working artists) and painters. They are softened by a light wood wash and are structurally extremely sound, with a hidden ballast of steel plates concealed within the base. The gallery is spacious, and if viewed during the daytime, it is filled with natural light, with a view to the south of LACMA’s new garden of palm trees, grass and rock. Quite pretty!



Q: *In years past, high quality local tribal art collections could not find a home in the Los Angeles museum scene and went out of town, or were dispersed by the hammer of the auction houses. How strong is LACMA’s commitment to help fill the museum’s gaps in the area of tribal art?*

A: The most critical commitment is that of the Director, Michael Govan. He has the strong support of the trustees, and some are collecting tribal art themselves. Michael clearly understands that a major museum cannot legitimately exist without representing the arts of Ancient America, Africa and the Pacific. It is of interest to note that the funds for the acquisition were raised over a relatively short time period, were raised as dedicated funding for the Art of the Pacific collection, and were generated entirely by members of LACMA’s Board of Trustees.



EAC e-news: *Nancy, thank you for talking to us. Best wishes for a successful show.*

Note: All images courtesy of LACMA. Image, page 1: Dance Staff, New Britain, Gazelle Peninsula, Tolai People



A Warm WELCOME to EAC’s New and Returning Members!

- Richard Kelton...
- MeraLee Goldman...
- Bobbi and Tim Hamill...
- Adrienne O’Donnell...
- Monica Braunstein and Barbara Townsend...
- Eric H. Kline...
- Jane Ruhm...





Moving Forward, Treasuring a Tradition of Excellence

By Wolfgang Schlink, Chairman, EAC

I am honored to represent the Ethnic Arts Council as chairman for the next two years. The past few weeks have been a whirlwind tour of visits with many senior as well as new members of EAC. I wanted to learn more about the origins of the organization and how it has evolved to its current state. I also wanted to understand the expectations of EAC's members.

When EAC was formed in the mid-1960s, it was a gathering of some forty high end collectors, scholars, and art dealers. The initial focus was on pre-Columbian art. There was a need for education and for information exchange. Literature for collectors was in its infancy. And, in the Los Angeles museum scene of the day, there was not much to look at or to learn from. "In terms of ethnic arts, there was no there there", to modify Gertrude Stein's famous quotation. As a result, EAC constituents took the initiative and created pre-Columbian exhibitions with loans and donations from their own collections. These shows - in the early 1970s - were hosted by the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History (NHM). Catalogs were published, member scholars wrote the text. One could truly say that EAC members were educating local museums. The roster of EAC's Board of Directors read like a "Who's Who" in world class art collecting.

Subsequently, art interest within EAC shifted to African art and later to Oceanic art. Important collections were built in those fields. The history of EAC collectors and collections, dealers and galleries is vibrant and vastly important. That story is waiting to be preserved and written.

Time did not stand still. Collections could not find a home in Los Angeles museums. Collectors left town. Dealers closed their galleries. Meanwhile, the demographics of EAC changed. Today's members are frequently more interested in the vanishing cultures that had produced the art than in the art itself. Yet the curiosity about ethnic and tribal art in its grand plethora of forms, media, and geographic diversity remains a major reason for new members to join EAC.

Great programming is the heart and soul of this organization. The call I heard loud and clear from members new and old is for education, for in-depth and diversified programs, for information sharing regarding art and travel. The motivated EAC Board is hard at work (image, right) to make all this happen. For starters, we will be launching the EAC Screening Room (see page 8), a series of films related to art and cultural issues; screenings with the film maker present or in combination with a relevant lecture. Another focus will be on "Celebrating the Collector and the Collection".

And we most certainly will revive the "Intrepid Collector" program. EAC's tradition of excellence is a challenging obligation for its future.





The Ethnographic Lens

Mongolian Horsemen

Location: Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Date: August 31, 2006

EAC e-news dug once more into passionate traveler **Audrey Stein's** archives. In Audrey's own words:

The year was 1206 when Genghis Khan forged the Central Asian confederations into a unified Mongolian Empire. 800 years later this momentous event was celebrated in Ulaanbaatar with "The Festival of Eurasia".

The highlight of one afternoon was a re-enactment of Genghis Khan's battles. Hundreds of skilled horsemen in Mongol costumes came thundering across a huge field kicking up a sea of dust. The excitement was palpable with arrows flying and sword fights from horseback taking place right in front of me. Needless to say, my trusted Canon 5D was yearning for a professional cleaning upon my return to Los Angeles.

The wonder of this adventure followed me home where I was invited to present a slide show of the event to the first meeting of Mongolian businessmen in Southern California. A Mongolian guest looked at the image pictured here and told me that he had been one of the riders on that extraordinary day!



EAC e-news welcomes members' contributions to **The Ethnographic Lens**. E-mail your jpg (150 pixels/squ. inch resolution) to the editor.

Programs · Review

The EAC Annual Dinner and Silent Auction

One-hundred-and-twelve EAC revelers and guests attended the Annual EAC Dinner at the Rose Café in Venice, CA on October 4. To start with the bottom line - this is EAC's main fundraiser - the net income was in excess of \$20,000, an all time record. A very welcome infusion for EAC's 2010 grant giving coffers.

The silent auction, expertly orchestrated by EAC Secretary Mark Johnson proved to be the major draw. The Hamson brothers escaped the tumult of the evening bidding and outsourced - a very effective move - their generous contribution to ebay. Rumor has it that most of their winners are European collectors. Yet, at least two winning bids - sources say - were placed by an ebay savvy EAC member. EAC ex-chairman Will Hughes came through (again) with a very generous cash donation. Will, thank you and our best wishes for a speedy and complete recovery! And, the per plate price of having dinner with guest of honor, Fowler Director Marla Berns moved up in lockstep with the recovering stock market.



A heartfelt "Thank You!" to all donors, buyers, bidders, vendors, calligraphers, cashiers, hosts, and volunteers that made the evening a success. Few will ever know - if they are not members of the dinner team - how much blood, sweat, tears, and enthusiasm go into the planning and execution of this event.

A special EAC honoree award went to **Claire and Dr. Harry Steinberg**, the latter soon to be 100 years old! Proof that humor and creativity make a difference. The honor was presented by Richard Baum, reminiscing many an EAC event held at the Steinberg residence and pottery studio.

The same honor was bestowed on **Barbara Goldenberg**; she and her late husband Joseph being committed members since EAC's very early years. Who wouldn't cherish the unforgettable nights of previous EAC dinners, the Chris Donnan *Moche* lecture, or - more recently - the *Singing Darwin* fundraiser hosted by Barbara at her magic residence? Let alone the opportunity to visit her stunning art collection. Outgoing chairwoman and intimate friend Feelie Lee gave a moving tribute.

Incoming chairman Wolfgang Schlink delivered the acknowledgement speech in honor of Feelie, praising her valuable contributions over many a year at the helm or at key board positions of EAC. The Council can count on Feelie's continuing guidance and wisdom as Vice Chair. Treasurer Kaija Keel, expert ceramist, yet also a wizard with voluminous knitting needles had created a stunning cashmere present for Feelie (image, right).



As always, the presence and the presentations of EAC's local museum friends (LACMA, Fowler, CAFAM, Autry, Bowers, and the San Diego Museum of Art through SANA) were very much appreciated. Well, most anything in life can be tweaked and improved. Yet, most dinner guests seemed to like the Rose Café venue - ambience, food, and service.

EAC shall return... at some point in time.

Dora De Larios at CAFAM

Some two dozen EAC members attended the gallery talk with acclaimed ceramist Dora De Larios (image, far right) at CAFAM on October 18. The artist - in her introductory remarks - made a point thanking EAC for its grant that made the exhibit possible. With self-assured eloquence, Dora commented the highlights of the show and her illustrious life. Women dominate in De Larios' oeuvre; images of goddesses and heroines. Stylistic influences speak Asia and Meso-America; complex and larger than life pieces that took years to complete. Great art by a wonderful artist!

The following museum courtyard reception - courtesy of CAFAM - was a welcome opportunity to interface directly with the artist as well as the show's curator, Elaine Levin.





Programs · Preview · Save the Date!

EAC members: Look for special announcements later this week!

• **November 22, 2009, 2-4 pm, in L.A.: Keris - The Sacred Ceremonial Dagger**

A “show and tell” by Asian and Indonesian art specialist, EAC’s own **John Strusinski**. Insights into one of the more mysterious artifacts of the Indonesian and Malay Archipelagos.

• **December 6, 2009, 2-5pm, in L.A.: EAC Screening Room - View from a Grain of Sand**

We are launching the **EAC Screening Room** series with director **Meena Nanji**’s feature documentary **View from a Grain of Sand**. More relevant than ever, **View** is praised as one of the most informative films about women in Afghanistan. Shot under extremely difficult circumstances in war-torn Kabul and in the Afghan refugee camps of Pakistan, the film provides a harrowing, thought provoking portrait of a brutalized nation. Shown in a deluxe private screening room. Film maker Meena Nanji will be present for Q&A and at a reception following the screening.

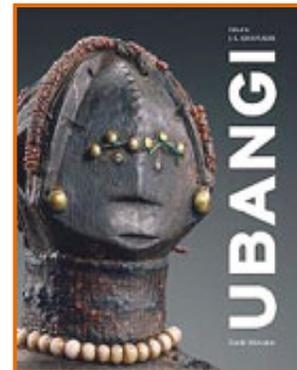


Books · Art and Culture · Reviews by EAC Members

1. **Ubangi: Art and Cultures from the African Heartland**, edited by Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers.
2. **Surfaces: Color, Substances, and Ritual Applications on African Sculpture**, edited by Kahan, Page, and Imperato. **Bobbi Hamill** writes:

The pleasure to be gained from lingering over beautifully photographed objects succeeding one another on page after page of the classic African “masterpiece” sort of book is in limited supply here. On the other hand, one is free to skim over or plunge into broad expanses of information, intelligently organized and well-written. A pleasure of a different sort.

Ubangi: Several fold-out pages of simple line drawings serve to clarify the distinctions among the complex and overlapping similarities of style displayed by Ubangian sculpture. What a wonderful way to eliminate the distractions of patina, adornment and detail while focusing on the basic “bones” of shape and posture! This is a reference tool of considerable value. The photographs are plentiful and the wide-ranging essays (on the subjects of cultural practices, language and history as well as aesthetics and authenticity) are individually interesting and coherently presented.



Surfaces: This is more of a challenge; everything you ever wanted to know along with plenty of stuff you may not understand about the construction, application and meaning of the various surface embellishments found on African objects. Although photographs are provided to illustrate the various essays, most of the 500+ pages consist of text. This is scholarly material: A nice addition to the tribal library but probably not something to keep on the nightstand.

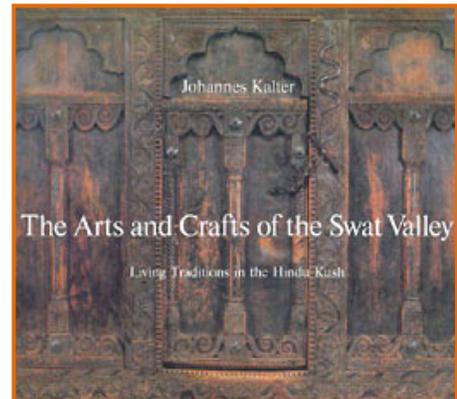


3. The Art and Crafts of the Swat Valley: Living Traditions in the Hindukush, edited by Johannes Kalter. Reviewed by Wolfgang Schlink:

The first publishing of **Swat** in 1991 was timely. We were looking for ethnic architectural elements to be integrated into our house construction, and Santa Fe was awash with pillars and doors from mosques, as well as chests, chairs, prayer boards, and utilitarian objects - from Swat Valley. Swat? Kalter - at the time head of the Oriental Department, Linden Museum, Stuttgart - writes (1991!): "The name Swat will not mean very much even to many of those who are well acquainted with the Islamic World." Wow, has that dramatically changed by 2009. Today, Swat is one of the "in the news" hotbeds of Taliban take-over of traditional tribal lands in north-western Pakistan.

Back to the early 1990s: **Swat** became our guide book into the region's culture, enriched by the much appreciated personal insight of experts Andy Hale and Kate Fitz Gibbon (Anahita Gallery, Santa Fe). The book is just not what the title portrays. You'd expect an art and crafts tome of the coffee table genre. Not so much; this is an early in-depth look into Islamic culture, the role of women, the role of men, the history of the region, the traditional art of superb wood-carvers, and the symbolism of design.

If you want to understand the region's cultural and religious issues, you can do so by studying **The Arts and Crafts of the Swat Valley**.



All reviewed books can be *amazoned*.

Travelogue · Paris · Parcours des Mondes

Julie Du Brow, **EAC e-news** foreign correspondent, sent these images from the September Parcours des Mondes in Paris, Europe's prestigious tribal art fair. Exhibitors included EAC's Thomas Murray (*far left*, Mask, Bali) and Michael Hamson (*second from right*, PNG ancestor figure) as well as Bernard Dulon (*center*, Tau Tau figure, Sulawesi), and Kevin Conru (*far right*, Maori figure).





Art Calendar

- **The Los Angeles Asian & Tribal Arts Show**, Nov. 14 - 15, Santa Monica Civic Auditorium. Preview Opening: FRI, Nov. 13, 6 - 9 pm. Show hours: SAT, 11 am - 7 pm, SUN, 11 am - 5 pm. More info at www.caskeylees.com.
- **Fowler Museum at UCLA**, more info at www.fowler.ucla.edu
Ongoing exhibitions:
Grass Roots - African Origins of an American Art.
Fowler in Focus: African Basketry Arts - Thinking Outside the Basket
Steeped in History: The Art of Tea (closes Nov. 29)
- **LACMA**, more info at www.lacma.org
Art of the Pacific, see interview, page 1
The Newly Reopened Korean Galleries
Heroes and Villains: The Battle for Good in India's Comics



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The Ethnic Arts Council of Los Angeles (EAC)

· Dedicated to Advancing the Knowledge, Interest, and Appreciation of Ethnic Art ·

Become a member! Contact: Lyn Avins, EAC Membership Co-chair, lavins@ucla.edu

