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## NEW GUINEA ART

MASTERPIECES FROM THE JOLIKA COLLECTION OF M. AND J. FRIEDE

*John Friede, Greg Hodgins, Philippe Peltier, Dirk Schmidt, and Robert L. Welsch*

For centuries now, the art of New Guinea has been among the least known arts in the world to Europeans. One of the reasons is geography. New Guinea is a far-off island in the South Pacific as big as France and Italy combined and lies to the east of Indonesia and north of Australia. It is a mountainous island with low-lying land around the coast and a largely inaccessible hinterland. The climate is humid, owing to frequent monsoons. There are over one thousand languages on the island and numerous cultures and artistic styles live side-by-side.

The attraction of New Guinea's art lies in its variety and creativeness. Over the centuries the local inhabitants have manufactured a wide range of objects designed to communicate and interact with the spirit world. Most of these objects, inspired by myths and ancient religious beliefs, can stand comparison with the greatest sculptural masterpieces in the world. Some are connected with health, fertility, or rites of passage; others appear at the end of a period of ritual mourning or act as protection against evil spirits and disease. The craftsmanship displayed in ordinary everyday objects, be they house pillars, dishes, canoes, or shields, is always immense. The art uses a wide range of materials obtained from the surrounding environment: shells, stones, feathers, bone, wood, bark, textiles, sago palm leaves, nuts and seeds, human hair and bright colours obtained from natural pigments. And although these objects have never been made to last any great length of time beyond their immediate purpose, they have nevertheless survived hundreds, in some cases even thousands, of years.

We can now admire the art of New Guinea in all its splendour thanks to this elegant two-volume work containing over 650 masterpieces from the collection of John and Marcia Friede, who spent decades gathering and studying them. It is no exaggeration to say that this selection from the most important private collection in the world, which John and Marcia Friede have named the Jolika Collection in honour of their three children, provides a comprehensive panorama of this art. The first volume contains a sumptuous array of magnificent full-colour plates, while the second volume is devoted to essays by three renowned experts and an important illustrated catalogue, also furnished by John Friede.

The publication of this splendid work was designed to coincide with the reopening in fall 2005 of the completely restored De Young Museum in San Francisco, which has been associated with the art of the South Pacific for decades. Thanks to John and Marcia Friede's generous donation of their collection to the Museum of Fine Arts in San Francisco, this has now become the chief centre for the study and preservation of the art of New Guinea.