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KRIS HILTS MASTERPIECES OF SOUTH-EAST ASIAN ART

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Photographs by Mauro Magliani

This unique publishing project opens a window onto the world in which the kris—defined by UNESCO as a “Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity”—is the weapon of South-East Asia par excellence and representative of a people’s culture and soul.

This book takes us into the unknown world of the hilts of the traditional weapons of Indonesia and Malaysia, the kris, which embody a bridge between the Visible and Invisible worlds. They are art objects that represent abstract, human, divine and demoniac figures. Masterpieces of sculpture and engraving by the archipelago’s master-craftsmen, here they are presented in all their splendour.

The hilts of kris have long been collectors’ items among lovers of oriental art, perhaps more so than the kris itself as a weapon. Through presentation of the Lanfranchi collection, this book introduces the reader to this cultural world that was once the exclusive prerogative of the local inhabitants and only made widely known by the Dutch when they occupied what was then known as the East Indies.

Kris are objects of great beauty—carved, chiselled or incised by artist-craftsmen who bring a great sense of aesthetics and proportion to their work, as well as a deep knowledge of the symbolism and traditions of their lands.

Java, Sumatra, Bali, Madura, Sulawesi and Malaysia: each island has its own type of hilt, a fact that makes it possible to establish the geographic provenance of every kris and to enter into the various local traditions, symbolism and magic that have contributed to its manufacture. These small sculptures range from extreme abstraction to anthropomorphic figures, geometric patterns to images of the plant and animal worlds. They are made by expert Malay craftsmen from materials such as wood, fossil ivory, gold and whalebone.

Vanna Scolari Ghiringhelli is a collector and expert in Eastern side-arms, in particular kris since 1968. A member of the Accademia Ambrosiana, she is an associate of the Italian Institute for Africa and the Orient and Vice-President of the Italian-Asian Cultural Centre in Milan.

Mauro Magliani and **Barbara Piovan** are internationally known art photographers and work for many museums and international collectors.