

allows for conversations to deepen further between Islander artists, perhaps framed by a more specific thematic. Alternately, single works could very well be merged into larger institutions. Some are ready to jump into the limelight. Castro's *Red House*, in particular, deserves a permanent place in a major art museum. While the exhibit features uneven levels of artistic and professional maturity, it nevertheless represents a key moment for Oceanic art exhibition and production on the US continent. Castro participated in exchanges about diaspora and decolonization at a groundbreaking symposium, "Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge," at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 2000, jumpstarted by scholars Vicente M Díaz and J Kēhaulani Kauanui (see *TCP* special issue 13:2 [2001]). An argument can be made that the artists herein represent a movement analogous to Native Pacific Cultural Studies, one that is crafting visual and performative discourses that can stretch the boundaries of indigenous diasporas and practices while remaining grounded in Native (is)lands.

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Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art and Society in the Papuan Gulf of New Guinea. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 24 October 2006–2 December 2007.

Exhibits of the Oceania section of the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas (AAOA) are temporarily displayed in the African

galleries of the Metropolitan Museum while the Rockefeller Wing renovation is underway. The current exhibition, "Coaxing the Spirits to Dance," is the first to be dedicated to the art of the Papuan Gulf since Douglas Newton curated "Art Styles of the Papuan Gulf" at the Museum of Primitive Art in 1961. Like its predecessor, "Coaxing the Spirits" focuses predominantly on the figurative sculpture of ceremonial male culture in the gulf, with superb examples of dynamic Gope and Hohao boards, and powerful Iriwake, Bioma, and Agibe figures from throughout the region. However, the New York manifestation of the exhibition, which comes to the Metropolitan from the Hood Museum in Dartmouth (where it was curated by Robert Welsch), brings another level of visual material to these striking artifacts: Metropolitan curator Virginia Lee Webb has added photographs from the AAOA Photo Study Collection, many of which depict the actual objects in their original contexts. The juxtaposition of images and objects thus coaxes out several different narratives, some more explicit than others.

The primary exhibition narrative presents the rich vibrancy of the art of the Papuan Gulf, with the viewer's aesthetic appreciation enhanced by seeing photographs of the objects in the places they were originally made, presented, and collected. The carved and painted boards on display are the home of important spirits, which must be coaxed into life through their continued activation in social and ceremonial life. These figures were carefully kept in longhouses, jostling among other such spirits, which in turn were understood to assist in local hunting, harvesting, health, fertility, wealth,

and so on, and were used to delineate both communal and clan identities. Photographs taken by A B Lewis or Kathleen Haddon, for instance, show these boards in the half-light of the longhouse or held up by the people who made them and lived with them, testifying to the ways in which these objects were animated in a social context. The exhibition draws the visitor's attention primarily to the formal elements of these carvings—the ways in which their stylized faces, navels, and other figurative elements displayed clan identities and crystallized local cosmologies. To this end, the objects are displayed on buff backgrounds, juxtaposed solely with one another and the photographs that lie, like visual labels, beneath them (photo 1).

Underlying this main visual narrative (and highlighted by the neutral, fine-arts display strategy) is another less explicit one, underscoring the interest that these pieces held for European, American, and Australian collectors. Drawn from a number of private collections (the exhibition at the Hood comprised primarily objects from its own collection), the linking between the displayed objects, and their spectral presence in the photographs on display, tracks a history of collection and movement encapsulated by the work of photographer-collector-anthropologists like Captain Frank Hurley, F E Williams, and Paul Wirz. The snapping of the shutter thus becomes a metaphor for the relentless appropriation of objects and their



PHOTO 1. View of the “Coaxing the Spirits to Dance” exhibition. Photo by Haidy Geismar.

perambulation through museums and private collections outside Papua New Guinea. For instance, the viewer's attention in both the exhibition and the catalog is drawn to the presence of an important Irivake figure from the private collection of Bruce Seaman in Honolulu in a photograph taken by



PHOTO 2. Irivake figure, from the Papuan Gulf, Urama Island, Aird Delta, Maiaki Village, near Kinomeri. Wood, pigment, fiber, and bark. 59 inches overall. Donated by Bruce and Ramine Seaman, Honolulu. SLIO.2006.5.1. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Paul B Rautenfeld in Maiaki village, Urama in 1925 (photo 2).

The context of the photographic encounters, and the tales of how various sculpture left their villages and moved across the world, remain untold. Despite the emphasis on the benefits of seeing objects “in situ,” throughout the exhibition the repeated connection between contemporary collected objects and their past presence in early photographs often suggests more about the importance today for establishing good and authentic provenance for collections than it tells us about the “ethnographic” context. The minimal information provided about these objects in the gulf is all written in the past tense. The objects on display are located primarily within the aestheticized context of the collection and archival commentaries from the photographers. What is lacking is any sense of the contemporary trajectories or context of these objects in the Papuan Gulf today—even though the curators collaborated with people from that area and the National Museum of Papua New Guinea during research for the exhibition. As one of my undergraduate students wised in a review of the exhibition written for class, “[The labels] do not describe the maker or purpose of the object but rather the Western photographer and the history of the photograph . . . one must ask the question of whose history do these photographs embody? Surely the history of the Papuan Gulf is not the main focus here, and one would have to coax a lot harder for the spirits to truly dance.”

Sebastian Haraha of the National Museum of Papua New Guinea, who was a long-term collaborator dur-

ing the exhibition research, addresses some of these contemporary issues in an essay in the beautifully illustrated exhibit catalog. Haraha wrote his comments before the public challenge to the provenance of certain objects on display in the Jolika Collection of the de Young Museum in San Francisco (see review, *TCP* 19:345–351), and the arduous endorsement of contemporary collectors by official representatives of the Government of Papua New Guinea in April 2006, expressed in a letter from the Embassy of Papua New Guinea to the de Young Museum director and reported in the online edition of *Nature* (44 [6]: 722–723). Haraha emphasizes that the pieces in this collection were primarily gathered in museum-sponsored field trips or through enforcement of the National Cultural Property (Preservation) Act, which prevents export of older objects of cultural significance. He describes how the PNG National Museum is viewed locally as a contemporary Haus Tumbuna, or longhouse, storing ancestral knowledge in the form of artifacts within a new environment of knowledge preservation and production in object form.

The history of movement and collecting embodied in these objects and photographs is inevitably entangled in complex networks of colonialism, as Virginia Lee Webb notes in her catalog essay. The juxtaposition of these images and objects draws us both to wonder about how this kind of comparative exercise was enabled, and to challenge the timeless presentation of ritual artifacts as fine art, with the decontextualized emphasis on form and the naturalization of collecting contexts that this entails. However,

bringing these two very different kinds of objects together also joins two very different moments of these objects' lives in a more connected trajectory. As Webb comments, "The click of the camera's shutter mimics the human view, creating this souvenir of vision" (52). The photographs open a window into the ways in which these temporal connections do in fact tell us much about how we see these objects in terms of ideals about art and within the pragmatic and academic interests encapsulated in contemporary and past collection practices in Papua New Guinea.

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Power and Taboo: Sacred Objects from the Eastern Pacific. The British Museum, London, 28 September 2006–7 January 2007.

Pasifika Styles. Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, London, 5 May 2006–February 2008.

Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia. University of East Anglia's Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, 21 May–13 August 2006.

Last year saw the Pacific emerge into the public eye in the United Kingdom through a series of exhibitions and associated events that were spread across the southeast, creating a new Polynesian triangle of sorts between Cambridge, Norwich, and London. I was involved in many of the openings and celebrations in various guises, as