

Sidney M. Mead ed. *Exploring the Visual Art of Oceania*. Honolulu; the University Press of Hawaii, 1979. Pp. xviii, 455, illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. \$25.00.

Since the days of Linton and Wingert's *Arts of the South Seas* (1946), which was a superb summary of our knowledge of Pacific art at that time, survey books on Oceanic art have been more notable for their dimensions, weight, and dramatic illustrations than for their factual content. *Exploring the Visual Art of Oceania* presents a welcome contrast to this thirty-four-year-old tradition. The volume grew out of a symposium held at McMaster University in 1974, which drew together some of the greatest living experts on the arts of the Pacific. The participants included anthropologists, archaeologists, art historians, historians, museum people, and prominent Pacific islanders. It is precisely this mixture of scholarly expertise which accounts for the variety of approaches found in the book.

The volume embraces a wise selection of topics from Australia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. The first four articles deal with archaeology and its possible relevance to Oceanic art styles of approximately the European contact period (Green, Maynard, Newton, Specht). Although necessarily speculative, these studies are essential if we are to understand the sources of the later styles. The remainder of the twenty-two papers covers recent field studies among traditional groups (Corbin, Dark, Kaufmann, Mead, Schwimmer, Steager); functional and stylistic analyses of museum collections (Badner, Bodrogi, Gathercole, Gerbrands, Kaeppler, Rose, Teilhet); culture change and its effects on the arts (Counts, Gathercole, Graburn, Kooijman, Lewis, Smidt); and esthetic and methodological approaches (Carlson, Forge, Guiart).

All of the articles are important to anyone interested in Pacific arts; however, some of the reports are of particular interest because they help fill in a few of the great lacunae in the literature. The extraordinary bark cloth masks and constructions of the Baining of New Britain have appeared in almost every text on Oceanic art with little if any explanation. Although the mask forms have evolved since the turn of the century, they are still part of a longstanding tradition which is fully explained in George Corbin's article. The beautiful sculptures of the Solomon Islands have suffered a similar lack of information in the literature and it is refreshing to read how Deborah Waite has unified a plethora of scattered bits of data into a very coherent explanation of the styles and symbolism. Articles which have changed our basic notions concerning Polynesian arts have been very rare since the days of Peter Buck. So it comes as quite a surprise to find that Roger Rose has proven that "Tahitian" fly whisks came from the Austral Islands.

The book does have several shortcomings which need to be mentioned. The jacket claims that it "will be useful as a text for Pacific Art courses", yet this is clearly not the case. While it certainly will provide supplementary readings for such courses, it has neither the scope, nor overall unified approach which would be necessary for a text.

The reproductions in the book are poor, and none are in color. Often line drawings are substituted for photos. All of this tends to present Pacific art not as Art, but as ethnographic objects. This contradiction of the title of the book must have been dictated by budgetary considerations but for the art of the Pacific to be fully understood, its visual impact should be faithfully reproduced.

Thirdly, Oceania does not end with the western shores of Irian Jaya. Many groups which comprise non-Indianized Indonesia are part of an Oceanic pattern of culture. The absence of the Lesser Sunda Islands, the Toraja, almost all of Borneo, the Batak of Sumatra, Nias, and Enggano among many others, is an archaism in both the conference and the book which cannot be justified in view of current archaeological, linguistic, and artistic data.

Despite these objections, what the book does, it does admirably well. It presents much new information and insights which are now basic to an understanding of Pacific art. It is an apt memorial to the late Mino Badner and one can only hope that this volume will inspire more research into Oceanic arts which could lead to the publication of more volumes like this one.

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