

Louise Lincoln, *Assemblage of Spirits: Idea and Image in New Ireland*, With essays by Tibor Bodrogi, Brenda Clay, Michael Gunn, Dieter Heintze, Louise Lincoln, and Roy Wagner. New York: George Braziller, in association with The Minneapolis Institute of Art, 1987, Pp. 168, 45 figures (20 b/w, 25 color), 49 color plates. Paperbound, US\$17.95 (plus \$2.50 postage and handling U.S., \$10.00 overseas, from: Museum Shop, The Minneapolis Institute of Art, 2400 Third Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minn. 55404).

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This work is a catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition "An Assemblage of Spirits: Idea and Image in New Ireland," which opened at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts in October 1987, and has traveled to the Brooklyn Museum; the Kimbell Museum, Fort Worth; and the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco.

The format and contents of the catalogue illustrate problems in the study of New Ireland art, which are rooted in the nature of the area's art, culture, and society, and in ways in which anthropologists have attempted to study them. New Ireland is typically Melanesian, being comprised of many groups differing linguistically and culturally. There is disagreement about how many language groups are found on New Ireland, from twelve to seventeen. The linguistic variation leads to problems in the names of *malanggans*, and masks, of the various ceremonies. Melanesian Pidgin English leads to additional confusion. Is the word *tatanua* Pidgin, or a generic Melanesian name? In the Notsi area, this reviewer was told that the Notsi word for *tatanua* was *nit titili*. The word *nit*, he was also told, meant "mask" (thus *nit kulegula*, the name given to a complicated large ceremonial mask, apparently parallel in usage to the *murua* masks in the Nelik linguistic area). And *wanis* (often mentioned in the exhibition and catalogue) could conceivably be a variation on the word *nit* and mean, generically, "masks."

Can this kind of confusion be clarified? Probably not until sophisticated linguistic research is done (a kind of research perhaps still possible to pursue, even among acculturated New Irelanders). A further step could be to attempt to get beyond the bewildering profusion of reported names armed with good linguistic formulations.

Another confusing factor in understanding New Ireland cultures and societies stems from the differing kinds of anthropology pursued in the area from German colonial times to recent times, especially when considering the earlier (mostly German) *ethnological* approaches, compared to later (Australian and American) *social anthropological* methodologies. Differing styles of anthropological study have often been noncomparable, and very difficult to link in historical sequences.

In spite of these difficulties, the catalogue--comprised of essays by writers of widely differing theoretical and methodological orientations--comes across well, in the sense that the various authors display commendable caution and confine their reports to what they have seen in the areas in which they have worked. However, the other side of this is that the catalogue does not present a comprehensive overview of New Ireland art, but instead explores a number of aspects of the art.

Lincoln's introduction (pp. 13-16) delimits the northern *malanggan* area from areas of other art styles on New Ireland, the central *uli* (hermaphroditic ancestor figure) area and the southern chalk figure area, also saying that all the pieces in the exhibition are, in one way or another, related to the *malanggan* practices of the north. Several of her interpretations, however, are speculative and not proven in the literature. These are: (1) the linking of birds, snakes, and fish with cosmic references to earth, air, and sea; (2) that an image of a bird and snake struggling suggests transition or mediation between the two forms; and (3) the transformation, reversal, and ambiguity of fish with broad lateral fins interpreted as a bird with fishlike head, and the inversion of an image of a bird holding a human head in its mouth as an inverted variant of a man holding a bird's head (as a mouth dance-ornament).

Bodrogi's essay, "New Ireland Art in Cultural Context" (pp. 17-32), shows command of the German literature. He died in 1986, and the catalogue is dedicated to his memory. Bodrogi mentions the various studies done in the area and says,

Because this work was done in various areas, at various times, and in different ways, it is doubtful whether cultural patterns can be established within a given area. Any analysis of the art . . . remains necessarily incomplete. It is clear, how-

ever, that the complex of rites carried out at the time of death are central to the social and aesthetic life of the community.

(Pp. 17-18)

Bodrogi lists various kinds of *malanggan* sculpture: fishes, poles, friezes, animal representations, masks, ritual ornaments. By doing this he follows the German literature in listing *as malanggans* those objects made in *malanggan* style, such as masks and ritual ornaments, although these are not, strictly speaking, *malanggans*. This reviewer would reserve the term for the images displayed in the *malanggan* ceremonies, in display houses.

Lincoln's essay, "Art and Money in New Ireland: History, Economy, and Cultural Production" (pp. 33-41), includes an excellent historical sketch of early contacts between Europeans and New Irelanders, including the statement that "trade goods such as metal and cloth could not have been uncommon in certain coastal areas of New Ireland by the middle of the nineteenth century" (p. 35). This statement could help dispel the idea that there were "stone-carved" artifacts, especially since most New Ireland art was collected in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century when metal tools were widely used.

Heintze's essay, "On Trying to Understand Some Malagans" (pp. 42-55), is excellent reporting of yet another variant of the New Ireland *malanggan* culture as seen from the vicinity of Fesoa. He has much to say about "families" of *malanggans*, that is, hierarchies of named *malanggans*, with attendant stories.

Heintze suggests the possibility that, as early as 1900, objects were made for sale to satisfy the demands of the European art market.

Heintze ends his essay on a note of caution:

I have deliberately refrained from more speculative considerations. For several decades far-reaching historical questions have dominated the study of malagan art without producing more than a few (admittedly interesting) hints. Though it is tempting to consider some formal characteristics, such as the subtle play of symmetries or the ingenuity of the malagan "ars combinatoria," an ordering of motifs by their iconographic function can never be done in an *a priori* manner. This fact demonstrates the limits of all secondary studies. (P. 53)

Wagner's essay, "Figure-Ground Reversal among the Barok" (pp. 56-62), presents a different approach to New Ireland art. While everyone

else struggles with problems of context and meaning of the art objects found in museums, Wagner treats us to a discussion of meaning and context *outside* the art, that is, certain ways of thinking and conceptualization among the Barok. He does describe the ceremony of the *kaba* tree, the root-table or "*wurzel-tisch*" mentioned in Krämer.

Clay's essay, "A Line of *Tatanua*" (pp. 63-73), is an excellent description of *tatanua* masking in social context. From this reviewer's observation of museum collections from New Ireland, *tatanua* masks are the most represented item by far. There are many more *tatanua* masks from New Ireland in world collections than any other kind of mask from the area.

Gunn's essay, "The Transfer of Malagan Ownership on Tabar" (pp. 74-83), is a discussion of part of the social context of *malanggan* in what is the most fully functioning system of *malanggans* left in New Ireland. None of the other writers, and I must include myself also, have seen *malanggans* being made and used in such profusion as in the Tabar Islands. Gunn says:

Tabar is often mentioned as the place of origin of the malagan, and indeed the islands are a strong reservoir of malagan ceremonial life. The rights to at least twenty-one major traditions are held by more than one hundred malagan-owning matrilineal kin groupings on Tabar. The sculptural output in the past has been tremendous, particularly during the period between 1880 and 1920, when examples of Tabar malagan art reached major museum collections throughout the world. A far greater proportion of Tabar artworks must have remained on Tabar, for a large number of malagan items are burned after the ceremony to forestall their use in sorcery. Many more items were placed with the dead in caves above the sea, to rot mingling with the corpse. (P. 74)

I have argued that the Tabar Islands are not necessarily the origin place of *malanggan* activities due to their isolation from the mainland. I can further argue that there may be a renaissance of interest in *malanggan* in New Ireland in general, but in the Tabar Islands it started on a richer base and has thus multiplied to greater heights.

In Gunn's list of the uses and functions of *malanggan* on Tabar, he lists seven different forms of obligations the patron must meet, ranging from the usually mentioned memorial rites to other usages such as validating land-use transactions, reactivating graveyards, establishing new

subclans, and ratifying social contracts (to settle arguments between clans). To this reviewer, these other uses for *malanggan* are startling, not having been observed on the mainland. Gunn's analysis, however, may have been influenced by his working with a much fuller and richer ceremonial environment. Also, he has been working in a different language and subculture area, the Tabar Islands, so the meanings and details are somewhat different.

At any rate, we have little more choice than to accept his statements at face value, and recognize that Gunn has found and has been working in a very rich social ceremonial environment where many relationships of *malanggans* and the social context may be seen.

The catalogue is a good value for the price, and the essays contribute various interesting and original ideas about New Ireland art. The authors have mostly confined their offerings to what they have seen in New Ireland and have held speculation and unwarranted generalization to a minimum. The catalogue portion of the work is a complete listing of every object in the exhibition, with each of the forty-nine illustrated in color. This catalogue portion is very informative in its own right, and approaches being a good substitute for seeing the exhibition itself.

There are several unusual kinds of objects in the exhibition, especially canoe prow ornaments and architectural panels. As the catalogue states, "Canoe prows are the earliest documented type of New Ireland sculpture, appearing in Tasman's well-known drawing of 1643, yet surviving examples are few" (p. 90). (And, this reviewer would add, often not recognized as canoe ornaments.) Catalogue entry no. 1, a canoe prow ornament from New Ireland, loaned by the Peabody Museum at Salem, has a (collection? acquisition?) date of 1867. Catalogue entry no. 3, listed as a canoe prow, was acquired by the Field Museum by purchase, in 1905. No. 2, called a boat prow ornament, loaned by the Museum für Völkerkunde, Hamburg, was acquired from the Museum Godeffroy in 1886, and depicts a man standing in the open mouth of a great fish and holding his hands up behind his ears. The caption is cautious about calling this a canoe prow ornament, and suggests it may have been part of a "soul boat," that is, a *malanggan* in the form of a canoe. Shark catching is suggested also, presumably because the shark fisherman listens for a certain distinctive sound, the clatter of floating debris, under which fish congregate, to which sharks are attracted. The fish whose head is depicted seems not, to this reviewer, to be a shark, but is either another species or a supernatural fish.

Another class of art objects not often represented in New Ireland col-

lections is that of architectural wall panels, of which three different examples are included in the exhibition. Catalogue no. 4, called a wall panel, loaned by the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, was collected by the Deutsche Marine-Expedition in 1908. The panel is flat, and the images depicted on it are done in two dimensions, with lines formed of thin rattan, and painted flat areas. Marianne George, who has worked in the Barok language area, writes (pp. 91-93) that the three female figures represent *dawan* (Barok, Patpatar languages) or *davar* (Mandak language), the name given to young girls who are secluded for long periods of time, fattened up and painted, and displayed to young men, a kind of female initiatory rite. George says that the panels were exhibited "in the manner of a malagan within the mortuary festivals" (p. 91). Although George said that the girls were secluded in tiny huts, this reviewer wonders if the panels were part of a house in which the girls were secluded.

Two-dimensional representations are extremely rare; low or high painted relief sculpture is much more usual.

No. 5, a set of nine architectural panels, painted relief carvings, collected in 1907-1909 by the Marine-Expedition and loaned by the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, are explained by a reference to Bühler, who in 1948 suggested that such panels formed the inner wall of a *malanggan* display house.

No. 6 is a set of two architectural panels. The catalogue entry suggests they were used in the same way as no. 5, as inner walls of a *malanggan* display house. The panels, acquired in 1900, were loaned by the Museum für Völkerkunde, Hamburg.

Several other exceptionally fine objects should also be mentioned. No. 27, a standing figure from Tatau Island in the Tabar group is a vertical *malanggan* figure. It was collected by Captain Farrell for the Australian Museum in 1887, and is thus a very early piece. At the bottom of the object is a man, in hocker position, knees to elbows, with a disproportionately large head, with black aerial tree-root mustaches. At the genital area of this figure is an upside-down head with arms that also are in hocker position, elbows to the knees of the bigger figure. Atop the large head is a bird, head facing downwards, and atop the tail feathers is a third human head, in turn surmounted by a bird. No. 25, acquired by the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, in 1879, is another fantastic and surrealistic image. It is 176 cm. high and depicts a man whose face is executed in naturalistic style, with pierced ears, and large, upstanding feather or foliage decorative forms. A smaller fantastic figure, with the head of a bird but the body and legs of a quadrupedal animal,

crouches on the man's chest. The lower half of the image is a flat, low relief carved plane, with snakes bordering it. The base ends in a peg. Another object, no. 34, from the Australian Museum, collected by Mrs. Farrell in 1892, is a huge (164 cm. high), massive human head with fish and birds atop the head and a bunch of betel nut hanging from the mouth. The photograph in the catalogue does not convey the size of the head; in the exhibition hall, it dominates the room.

Three objects from the collections of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts are included in the exhibition: no. 40, horizontal frieze depicting birds and snake; no. 28, standing figure with panpipes, acquired from the Museum für Völkerkunde, Dresden; and no. 48, vertical pole. All are very fine examples of New Ireland art and testify to the seriousness and enterprise of the Institute in acquisition of the very highest quality objects for their African, Oceanic, and American holdings.