

From the South Seas: Oceanic Art in the Teel Collection

Christraud M. Geary, Editor

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Curious Collection: “Oceanic art is a mysterious realm for most Westerners. When we first encounter it in a gallery of a museum, we perhaps sense that there is something in these strange masks that is a little frightening,” writes Michael Gunn, the associate curator for Oceanic Art at the Saint Louis Art Museum. Oceania is the region stretching from New Guinea and New Zealand to Easter Island and Hawaii. For centuries the indigenous people of these islands have created mysterious and lively works of art.

From the South Seas: Oceanic Art in the Teel Collection, edited by Christraud M. Geary (MFA Publications, 130 color and b/w photographs, 159 pages, hardcover, \$50.00, 978-0-87846-697-9) is an impressive showcase of eighty-three diverse sculptures, masks, and shields from the private collection of William and Bertha Teel.

An essay by Geary is included, which outlines the history and significance of many of the pieces, including a *kovave* mask dating from the late nineteenth century. An important part of the initiation cycle undergone by young men of the Elema tribe of Papua, New Guinea, the *kovave* consists of a conical headpiece with a carved face and a fiber fringe that covers the body. The piece is pictured and described later in the book, along with the others, organized by the region where each piece was gathered. Many of the pieces are also shown in use by their creators in authentic photographs taken by Western explorers.

Insight into an intriguing culture through meaningful artwork and ritual objects.

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