

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215 extension 224

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** PRESS PREVIEW:
Thursday, June 28, 1979
10 A.M. - 1 P.M. All press
and media
1 - 3 P.M. Additional time
for filming and photography

PACIFIC ISLANDS SHOW OPENS JULY 1

WASHINGTON, D. C. June 19, 1979. The Art of the Pacific Islands, a major international loan exhibition, will open July 1 at the National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition is the most comprehensive ever devoted to the visual arts of Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia and New Guinea. More than 400 of the finest works extant will be shown. It is the first major survey since the South Seas exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1947, since which time a great deal of new material has come to light.

Most of the objects in the show, which will continue on view in the East Building's Concourse-level galleries through October 14, come from the earliest periods of Western contact and exploration. They have been rigorously selected for their pristine aesthetic relationships to their original island cultures.

Many have never been exhibited or published before. Included in a very wide variety of media will be wooden figures, masks, canoe ornaments, shields and weapons, ceremonial implements, shell

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ornaments, and feather capes. A large figure of the Hawaiian war god Kukailimoku has been lent for the first time since its acquisition in 1846 by The Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts.

This piece and a twenty-two-foot figure of a crocodile used in New Guinea religious celebrations lent by the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas, are among several over life-size objects on view. More than eighty public and private collections in the United States, Europe and the South Pacific are lending to the exhibition.

The original island cultures flourished in areas unknown to Europeans until the sixteenth century. They remained free of European influence until the voyages of Captain James Cook and other explorers, their successors in the whaling industry and the China traders of the eighteenth century.

The artistic traditions of these isolated cultures, however, were for the most part unaffected by Western contact. Powerful works characterized by simple but elegant abstract design, great variation of form, particularly with the human figure, and sculptural mastery combined with striking use of color were still being produced well into the nineteenth century.

The exhibition has been organized by the National Gallery of Art. Selection of the objects and catalogue text have been provided by Douglas Newton, Chairman of the Department of Primitive Art of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Dr. Adrienne Kaeppler, Anthropologist at the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu, and

Dr. Peter Gathercole, Curator of the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge, England.

The exhibition's installation takes the visitor on a voyage of the island groups from east to west, beginning in Hawaii. The route then goes through the small island groups of Polynesia and related areas of Micronesia, traverses the large islands of Melanesia, and culminates in New Guinea. The installation illuminates stylistic relationships in certain areas and illustrates recurrent themes in the islands' art. It has been designed by Gaillard Ravenel and Mark Leithauser of the Gallery's Installation Design department with Douglas Newton.

Among the public lenders abroad are the Museum für Völkerkunde, Basel, Switzerland; The Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia; the Übersee Museum, Bremen, and the Linden-Museum, Stuttgart, Federal Republic of Germany; the Staatliches Museums für Völkerkunde, Dresden, German Democratic Republic; The British Museum, London, and the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, England; and The Otago Museum, Dunedin, and the Auckland Institute and Museum, Auckland, New Zealand.

U.S. lenders, in addition to The Peabody Museum of Salem, include the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, The American Museum of Natural History and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu, and The Peabody Museum in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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** Film crews and photographers should contact the Information Office (737-4215, ext. 224) in advance.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer) or Mary Dyer, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565, area code 202, 737-4215 ext. 224.