



Avant

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*Illustrated on front cover and on page 12*  
Important latmul Suspension Hook  
19<sup>th</sup> century or earlier  
Height: 62cm

galerie patrik fröhlich  
obere zäune 24  
ch-8001 Zürich  
+41 44 242 8900  
patrikfroehlich@swissonline.ch

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# Avant



*Illustrated as frontispiece and on page 20*  
Uli Ancestor Sculpture  
19<sup>th</sup> century  
H. 94cm

## Avant:

With this catalogue we present a careful selection of 15 Oceanic and African works of art. Being published early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – such as Pitt Rivers' *Works of Art from Benin* of 1900 or Richard Neuhauss' *Deutsch Neu-Guinea, Band 1* of 1911 – or exhibited at historic and seminal exhibitions – such as *Afrikanische Negerkunst und ihre Beziehungen zur Hochkultur – Sammlung Coray* of 1931 or the *Exposition Missionnaire internationale du Vatican* of 1925 – or moreover coming from the collections of renowned collectors and dealers – such as René Rasmussen, André Level or Walter Bondy – these artworks date to a time *before* external influences interrupted their underlying cultural customs and further were made long *before* the avant-garde of the 20<sup>th</sup> century found their inspiration in the formal solutions and concealed poesy of these objects.

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The Flying Fox Sculpture on view in the apartment of Walter Bondy, Paris, c. 1930

Flying Fox Sculpture  
Lower Sepik River, Papua New Guinea  
19<sup>th</sup> century  
Wood, pigments  
H. 25cm

Provenance:  
Collected *in situ* before 1910, probably by Richard Neuhauss  
Walter Bondy, Berlin and Paris, ca. 1930  
Property of an English Trust  
Lance Entwistle, London  
Private collection, New York, collection number EN 181

Published:  
Richard Neuhauss, *Deutsch Neu-Guinea, Band 1*, 1911, n° 228.b  
Walter Bondy, *view of the collection in his apartment*, c. 1930







The Flying Fox sculpture illustrated in Richard Neuhaus's  
*Deutsch Neu-Guinea Band 1*, 1911

### The Neuhaus-Bondy Flying Fox Sculpture

Dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this this magnificent flying fox sculpture from the Lower Sepik River area is both on of the first collected and first published of its type and was over the last 100 years part of some of the most acclaimed and remarkable collections of Oceanic art.

### Neuhaus' *Deutsch Neu-Guinea*

Published in 1911 by the German medical scientist Richard Neuhaus, *Deutsch Neu-Guinea Band 1* is one of the very early and important publications on the art of Papua New Guinea. Although only a few objects are depicted, the book gives an important over-view on pre-contact art from the Huon-Gulf and the Sepik River; the latter was visited by Neuhaus in 1910 together with Otto Schlaginhaufen, who was himself a noted field-collector of Oceanic art.

Included into this seminal publication is this magnificent flying fox sculpture from the lover Sepik River area, as can be seen on the picture on the left. Most likely collected by Richard Neuhaus himself around 1910, it was the German artist and renowned collector of Oceanic art Walter Bondy who acquired the sculpture in the years following the publication. Bondy, who is until today highly estimated for his deep understanding of quality, was based in Berlin and in Paris and it is in a picture of his Parisian home were the flying fox sculpture can be seen in c. 1930.

Whereas Neuhaus did not offer much information about its ritual function and also Otto Reche – when discussing a flying fox figure of the same type published in *Der Kaiserin-Augusta Fluss* of 1913 – could only speculate about the ritual function of these objects, it was the American anthropologist Albert Lewis who revealed their ritual meaning in his field diaries. Used as a love charms that could magically make someone fall in love with the owner of the object, they are potent and at the same time poetic objects.



This wonderful sculptural Iatmul *samban* suspension hook – acquired from its previous owner from the Museum für Völkerkunde in Basel – is the perfect embodiment of a female ancestor of great importance. Evidently of great age and carved with stone tools, it was hung from a rafter by a brace behind its head. As an exceptional and highly accomplished example of pre-contact Iatmul sculpture, it is a work of art of stunning presence that captivates through the slight movement of the body, the delicate painting on the face and the beautiful pattern of the scarification marks on the body.

Iatmul *samban* hook  
Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea  
19<sup>th</sup> century or earlier  
H.62cm

Provenance:  
Private collection Switzerland, acquired from the Museum für Völkerkunde Basel  
in the 1960s



Benin Bronze Plaque  
Nigeria, 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century  
Bronze  
H. 31cm

**Provenance:**

William Downing Webster, London  
Pitt-Rivers Collection, acquired on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1898  
Mathias Komor, New York, USA  
James G. Hanes Jr., North Carolina, USA

**Published:**

Pitt-Rivers, *Catalogues of his Second Collection, 1882-1898*, Vol. 6, 1898, p. 1801  
Pitt-Rivers, *Antique Works of Art from Benin – collected by Lieutenant-General Pitt-Rivers*, 1900, n° 295  
Sothebys London, *Primitive Art*, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1974, lot 114





Dating to the period between 1550 and 1640 this highly important and beautiful Benin bronze plaque represents the head of a crocodile – a remarkably rare type of which only about 20 are known, most of them in the collections of Museums, among them the British Museum in London, the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin, or the National Museum in Lagos. It was first published in 1900 in what is one of the first monographs on works of art from Benin and since then became a seminal book that had much influence on the perception and appreciation of the art from the Benin kingdom. In this book – which presented the *collection of Antique Works of Art from Benin* – collected by Lieutenant-General Pitt-Rivers – this magnificent bronze plaque was wrongly described as the elongated head of a horse, an apparent misunderstanding<sup>1</sup>, which was corrected as early as 1919 by nobody less than Felix von Luschan, the renowned German expert on art from the Benin kingdom.

In his preminent publication *Die Altertümer von Benin* Luschan included this important Benin bronze plaque into the small corpus of plaques depicting the head of a crocodile while emphasizing its outstanding artistic quality:

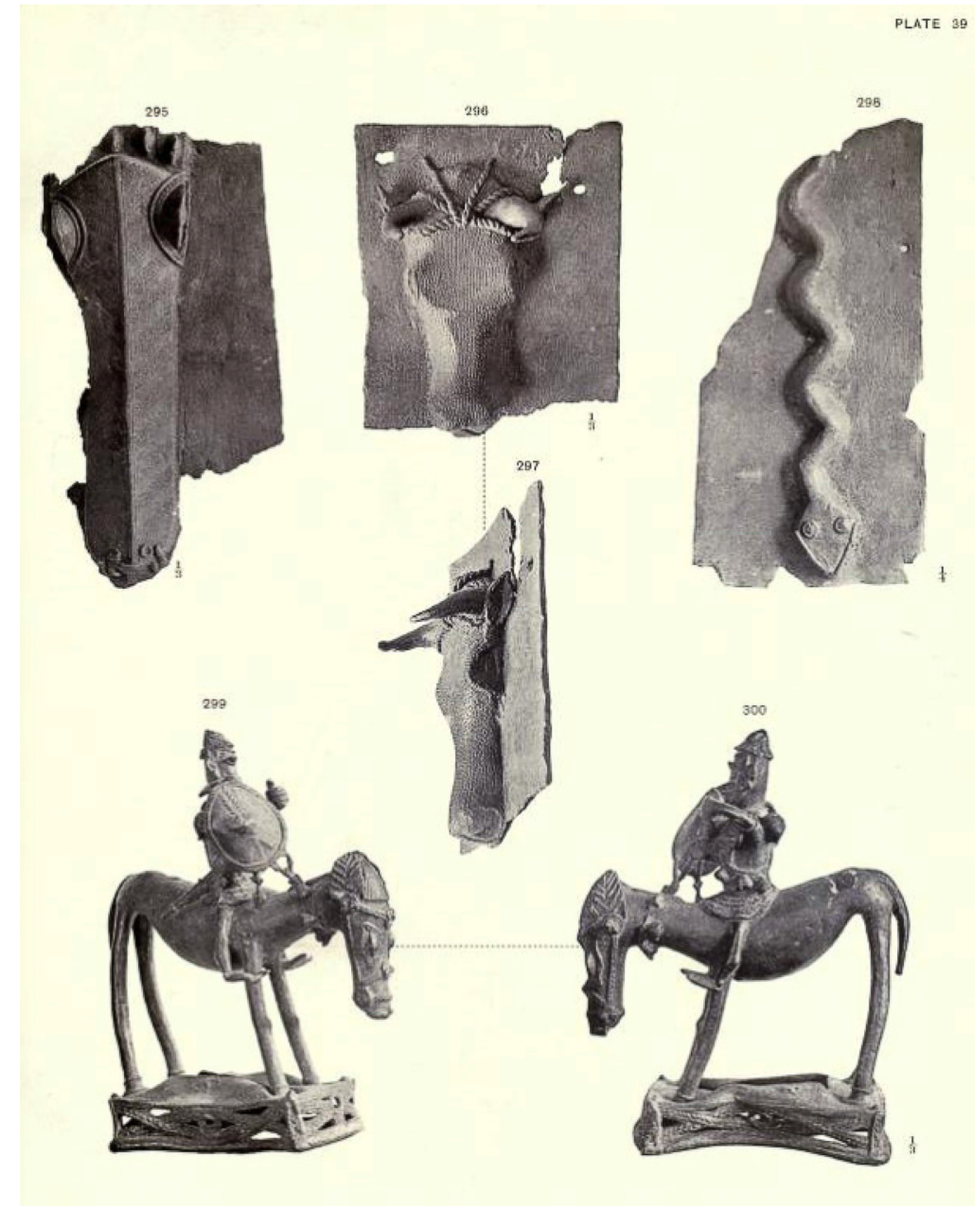
„Der Ordnung wegen muß auch erwähnt werden, daß der ganz besonders schöne und typische Krokodilskopf Rushmore, P. R. 295, als «head of a horse, very much elongated» beschrieben ist. Das ist ganz zweifellos ein Irrtum.“

"As a matter of form, the exceptionally beautiful and typical head of a crocodile from Rushmore, P.R. 295, there described as «head of a horse, very much elongated», needs to be mentioned. This description [as head of a horse] is without any doubt a misapprehension." Felix von Luschan, *Die Altertümer von Benin*, p. 273.

The crocodile was in the royal art of the Benin empire an important symbol, that linked the world of the water with the world of land. In the mythology of the Benin empire the king *oba* found his counterpart in the god of the ocean *olokun*, who was in charge of the crocodiles. That is why such heads of a crocodile can appear alone as in this example, as well as on plaques depicting the *oba*, where they appear right next to him.

Acquired by Pitt-Rivers in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from the English dealer William Downing Webster, this important Benin bronze crocodile plaque dates to the cultural heyday of the Benin Empire whose political and cultural decline had already begun in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. When in the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the role of the *oba* changed from a sole warrior king to a sacral sovereign, a period of important cultural growth had started. In the time between the mid-16<sup>th</sup> and the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century these famous Benin bronze plaques were casted on an order from the king for the palace and among them was this well-known, rare and highly beautiful bronze plaque of a crocodile.

<sup>1</sup>As late as 1932 this misapprehension was shared by M.Küsters and Dr. Stöcklein from the Völkerkunde-museum in Munich, who in the introduction of the *Afrikanische Negerkunst und ihre Beziehungen zur Hochkultur – Sammlung Coray* exhibition catalogue of 1931 compared this Pitt-Rivers Benin Plaque to a horse rider from the Coray collection.



Pitt-Rivers, *Antique Works of Art from Benin* – collected by Lieutenant-General Pitt-Rivers, 1900



It was with great pleasure that we were able to acquire this important Kota reliquary sculpture back, after having it sold in 2004 to a private Swiss collection. Of its type that is distinguished by an elongated nose, a sunlight pattern achieved by carefully including copper filaments into the structure of the brass stripes and a lengthened lozenge that is due to the age of these sculptures often partially broken, it is among the most accomplished works. Included into Alain Chaffins *l'Art Kota*, which shaped the understanding of Kota reliquaries until today, it was René Rasmussen, well known for his deep sense of quality, who had provided it for the noted publication.

Kota Reliquary Sculpture  
Gabon  
19<sup>th</sup> century  
Wood, brass, copper  
H. 40cm

Provenance:  
Galerie René Rasmussen, Paris  
Galerie Patrik Fröhlich, Zürich  
Collection F.A., Zürich, acquired in 2004

Publication:  
Alain Chaffin, *L'Art Kota*, 1979, n°193







Uli Ancestor Sculpture  
Northern New Ireland  
19<sup>th</sup> century  
Wood, kaolin, pigments, turbo petholatus shell  
H. 94cm

Provenance:  
Dr. Charles Maillant, born Mayer (1898–1993), Neuilly sur Seine  
Maurice Bonnefoy/ d'Arcy Galleries, New York, before 1970  
Dr. Karl-Ferdinand Schädler, Munich

Exhibition:  
Musée d'Ethnographie Neuchâtel, *Art Océanien*, 1970, n°1732

Publication:  
Loudmer, *Arts Primitifs*, 30 June 1994, lot 485



### An Uli Ancestor Sculpture

Only 255 *uli* ancestor sculptures are known, many of them today in the collections of museums. These important ritual figures from New Ireland have since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century become an icon among collectors of Oceanic art and are considered to be among the greatest works of Oceanic art in existence.

### The Uli Sculpture

As a work of art, this *uli* sculpture with the big, impressive bearded head and the beautifully painted body, is highly accomplished. Demanding to be seen in its tridimensionality it further offers a highly elaborate coiffure – representing cock's feathers – a beautiful deep concavity of the face and an alluring abstraction of the hands. The consistent repetition of horizontal lines on the body, such as the straight cut breast or the even line of the hands, are a further proof of the sculptural understanding of the artist, as is the different abstraction of both hands.

In its ritual context the *uli* sculpture was the receptacle of the spirit of an important warrior-chief. However, not considered to be the personal representation of an important ancestor, the *uli* was rather a mythological and superior entity.

### The Sculptures History

From the distinguished collection of Maurice Bonnefoy, this *uli* sculpture dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Maurice Bonnefoy, well-known for his expertise in the Art of Oceania, as well as his *Caves of the Karawari* catalogue of 1968 for which Bill Viola took the pictures, acquired the sculpture from Charles Maillant, born Charles Mayer, who started to collect African and Oceanic Art in the late 1930s and exhibited his collection in his hotel in Neuilly-sur-Seine. Maurice Bonnefoy, who acquired this *uli* figure in the 1960s or earlier from Maillant, lent it to the vast *Art Océanien* exhibition in Neuchâtel, Switzerland in 1970, an exhibition that gave an important overview on Oceanic art. Next to Bonnefoy it was Serge Brignoni, Nicolai Michoutouchkine and most of the important Swiss museums that lent their cherished objects to this exhibition.







The ideal of beauty forms the underlying concept of this early collected 19<sup>th</sup> century *okuyi* mask, which embodies the spirit of a beautiful young woman and thereby became the immortalization of one of the most admired and revered female members of its community. By investing the surface of the face with kaolin – a substance of symbolic meaning that was associated with the ancestral realm – the portrait became transcendently idealized. This way of combining actual beautiful features with supernatural ideals is especially succeeded within this significant and very elegant Punu mask, whose delicate and complex coiffure, as well as remarkable sensitivity of the face reveals the outstanding work of a master-sculptor.

Punu *okuyi* Mask  
Gabon  
19<sup>th</sup> century  
Wood, kaolin, pigments  
H. 25cm

Provenance:  
Collected in situ by M. René Labat between 1912 and 1920  
Galerie Bernard Dulon, Paris

Publication:  
Bernard Dulon, *Invitation Card*, Bruneaf 2008  
Bruneaf XVIII, *Galerie Bernard Dulon*, 2008 p. 52



This marvelous little Teke figure with the magical charge still intact from the collection of one of the most significant and earliest advocate of African art as Art per se – André Level (1863 – 1946), author of *l'Art Nègre et l'art Océanien* of 1919 and through his gallery part of the Parisian avant-garde in the 1920s and 1930s – is a perfect miniature sculpture that served its owner as a protective charm while hunting. Thus, of small size by function, every single detail is of uttermost precision and beauty.

Teke Charm *ipari*  
Republic of the Congo  
19<sup>th</sup> century  
Wood, pigments, magical charge  
H. 11cm

Provenance:  
André Level (1863-1947), Paris

Publication:  
Christie's, *Œuvres Modernes sur Papier – Ancienne collection André Level*, 22. March 2018, lot 26





Embodying an impressive sensitivity, this Senufo sculpture is a highly captivating, beautiful work of art. With the elaborately narrowing neck, the just slightly moved posture and the mild expression of the face it is a doubtlessly the creation of an important artist, a very old and long used sculpture of highest artistic quality. Thereby, it is an artwork that can build the core of a carefully selected African art collection and stand next to important works of 20<sup>th</sup> century art equally; just as it already did for the last 50 years when it was part of a private Swiss collection.

Senufo sculpture  
Ivory Coast  
Early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Wood, pigments  
H. 71cm

Provenance:  
Private Collection, Switzerland, acquired in the 1960s





Female Guro Mask *gu*  
Southern Guro people, Ivory Coast  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> century, early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Wood, pigments  
H. 35cm

Provenance:  
Han Coray, first collection, before 1928

Exhibition:  
*Afrikanische Negerkunst und ihre Beziehungen zur Hochkultur – Sammlung Coray*, Museum für Völkerkunde  
München, 1931





### The Han Coray Guro Mask

This Guro mask – a work of art of exceptional quality – was part of the legendary first collection of Han Coray and exhibited as early as 1931 in the historic exhibition in the Völkerkundemuseum in Munich. The mask – exceedingly well documented and of startling beauty – has a striking appearance, which is achieved by the very careful balance of the volumes, which are in perfect harmony with each other.

### The Master-Sculptor

The Coray mask is the work of one of the great and early master-sculptors of the southern Guro people that lived close to the village of Buafilé and worked in the late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The hallmarks of the Buafilé style – such as the oblique slit eyes, the long and narrow nose that has no nostrils, as well as the lipless, edged mouth – are of exceptional beauty in this mask.

Particularly well can the Coray mask be compared to another Guro gu mask, illustrated in *Les Arts Sauvages – Afrique* by Portier and Poncetton (Plate XXXIII). Next to the general characteristics of the Buafilé style mentioned above, these two mask further share the same beard, a very similar treatment of the coiffure and almost identical scarification marks on the forehead. Today's whereabouts of the Portier-Poncetton mask are unknown, but on date of the publication it belonged to Paul Guillaume and was attributed to the town of Zuénoula – a common attribution for masks from the southern Guro people at this time as Zuénoula and Buafilé are neighboring towns.

### The Mask and its History

This Guro mask was part of the first and legendary collection of Han Coray, who was also well-known for his role in Dadaism: As the gallerist of the Dadaistic artists in Zürich, it was him who held the seminal *1re Exposition Dada* exhibition in January 1917, showing works of Arp and Janco together with African art. It was Tristan Tzara – also actively involved in the exhibition – who had introduced Han Coray to the art of Africa and established the connection to Paul Guillaume.

In 1931 a selection of Coray's important collection was exhibited in the Völkerkundemuseum in Munich, a historic exhibition that offered a significant over-view on the Art of Africa. As can be seen on the picture on the right, part of that historic exhibition was this Guro mask.



The Guro masks on view in the Munich exposition of 1931  
© Museum Fünf Kontinente München





Exhibited in Rome during the *Exposition Missionnaire Internationale du Vatican* in 1925, this captivating Kongo mask is one of the very early masks of that region brought to Europe. Exceedingly well-documented and of historic origin, it is a very powerful Kongo mask with a fascinating appeal, painted with the characteristic black, white and red pigments. Its history was only recently made accessible anew by Nicolas Rolland's careful publication *Afrique à l'ombre des dieux*, in which an exhibition picture of the Vatican show is depicted, where the impressive mask is centrally displayed in its showcase.



The Kongo mask on view in the vitrine of the *Congrégation du Saint Esprit* during the *Exposition Missionnaire Internationale du Vatican*

**Kongo Mask**

Vili or Yombe peoples, DRC, 19<sup>th</sup> century

Wood, red, black and white pigments, metal, H. 33cm

**Provenance:**

Collected *in situ* by the *Congrégation du Saint-Esprit* before 1924

Galerie Dalton Somaré, Milano

**Exhibition:**

*Exposition Missionnaire internationale du Vatican*, 1924–1926

**Publication:**

Dalton Somaré, *Maschere africane di vecchia generazione*, 2008, n°12

Nicolas Rolland, *Afrique à l'ombre des dieux*, 2017, *picture of the exhibition in 1925*, p. 116



This small *uli* figure from the northern part of New Ireland – once part of a big ancestor figure but notwithstanding of perfect and complete appearance – is the embodiment of a mighty mythological spirit-being dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century or earlier. The several layers of pigments and kaolin show how repeated use over a long period of time occurred. With details like the beard elaborately made from fiber and a carefully carved intersection from the belly to the chin, it is a highly impressive work of art.

Uli  
Part of an ancestor Sculpture  
Northern New Ireland  
19<sup>th</sup> century or earlier  
Wood, kaolin, pigments  
H. 33.5cm

Provenance:  
Private Collection, France





Gogodala ceremonial canoe *gi gawa*  
Gulf of Papua, Papua New Guinea  
Late 19<sup>th</sup>–first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Wood, pigments  
L. 132.5cm

Provenance:  
John Friede, New York



← Gogodala ceremonial canoe

The Gogodala *gi gawa* is the ritual representation of a canoe and was considered the most important of all sacred objects relating to the initiation rites of young men into society. It is a splendid example, whereat the canoe itself is beautifully decorated with a characteristic design pattern. The prow – representing the head of a reptile in the moment of chasing a bird – is a perfect combination of sculpted form and impressive coloring. Dating to the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is a very rare object, coming from the renowned collection of Papua New Guinea Art from John Friede.

→ Lake Sentani Final

The art of lake Sentani is well-known for the architectural elements that were part of the ceremonial house. Mostly representing human ancestor figures, some rare finals representing a bird such as this example are known. Two examples of this style – coming from the collection of the Museum für Völkerkunde Basel, now renamed as Haus der Kulturen – are illustrated in Kooijman's noted publication the *art of Lake Sentani*.

Painted with white pigments and of beautifully reduced form, this Lake Sentani final from a private Swiss collection from Basel, Switzerland is a very poetic work of art.

Lake Sentani Final of a Ceremonial House  
Papua New Guinea  
Late 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Wood, pigments  
L. 171cm

Provenance:

Swiss private collection, old collection number 201







As one of the emblems of the renowned Kofler-Erni collection, acquired in the early 1960s from the Mathias Lemaire gallery in Amsterdam, this Wobe mask was chosen by Elsy Leuzinger in her role as curator of the Rietberg Museum Zürich, for the historic *Die Kunst von Schwarz Afrika* exhibition. Some years later Leuzinger published a more illustrated version of the exhibition catalogue, in which some carefully chosen objects were highlighted. Among them is this important Wobe mask, which is one of the very few examples that was depicted two times and in color. The American scholar Kathy Curnow consulted that publication when comparing the famous Wobe mask of the Oberlin college (see: Warren Robbins, *African Art in American collections*, 1966, p. 679) which bears the same traces of blue paint, forehead tacks, and iron hooks to the Kofler-Erni mask; a mask that was for more than half-a-century a centerpiece of their renowned Swiss collection.

Wobe Secret Society Mask  
Ivory Coast  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> century, early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Wood, pigments, metal  
H. 26cm

Provenance:  
Galerie Mathias Lemaire, Amsterdam  
Collection Max and Berthe Kofler-Erni, Basel

Published:  
René Wassing, *African Art*, 1968, p. 125  
Elsy Leuzinger, *Die Kunst von Schwarz Afrika*, Kunsthau Zürich 1970, n° F15  
Elsy Leuzinger, *Art de l'Afrique Noire*, 1978, p. 228 et 230  
Lorenz Homberger, *Mensch. Mythos. Maske. Kunstwerke aus Afrika, Ozeanien, Mittel- und Südamerika*, 1988, p. 6





Collected in the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Finschhafen – which was at that time part of what was known as *Kaiser Wilhelmsland* – this important house-board from the stylistic region of the Huon-Gulf was part of the men's house, which stood at the center of the social and ceremonial life. As outside of some German museums only very few house-boards from this region are known, it is a highly rare work of art that captivates through the intriguing presence of the mask-like face wearing the *oa-balan* headdress, which is the stylized representation of a festive coiffure made from precious feathers that evokes the impression of a fishtail.

Once in the private collection of the German zoologist Prof. Dr. Otto Bütschli (1848–1920), who was a scholar at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, an old label on the rear side identifies this Huon-Gulf house-board as the gift of Wladimir Schewiakoff (1859–1930), a Russian zoologist and student of Otto Bütschli in Heidelberg in the 1890s. A further label on its back allows some conclusions about its *in situ* usage. It was placed next to the entrance of the men's house and thereby one of the first ritual objects to be seen when entering this sacred place. Thus, this Huon-Gulf house-board is both, an important cultural emblem and a work of art that is of exceedingly well-documented history.

Huon Gulf House Board  
Finschhafen, Huon Gulf, Papua New Guinea  
19<sup>th</sup> century  
Wood, pigments, old labels  
H. 120cm

Provenance:  
Collected in the last part of the 19th century  
Wladimir Schewiakoff (1859–1930), Heidelberg, Germany  
Prof. Dr. Otto Bütschli (1848–1920), Heidelberg, Germany



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Robert Goldwater, *Senoufo Sculpture from West Africa*, 1964

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Jacques Kerchache & Jean Louis Paudrat & Lucien Stephan, *Art of Africa*, 1993

Simon Kooijman, *The art of Lake Sentani*, 1959

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Richard Neuhauss, *Deutsch Neu-Guinea, Band 1*, 1911

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galerie patrik fröhlich

obere zäune 24 ch-8001 Zürich  
+41 44 242 8900 [www.tribalart.ch](http://www.tribalart.ch)