

**LACMA ANNOUNCES ACQUISITION OF LANDMARK OCEANIC COLLECTION**

**New Works Highlight Initiative to Collect and Exhibit Art from  
Underrepresented Regions**



Rapanui Male Ancestor  
Figure (moai kavakava)  
(detail), Easter Island  
circa 1800



Solomon Ceremonial  
Shield (detail),  
Soloman Islands, Santa  
Isabel Island, circa  
1800

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) announced today the acquisition of one of the most significant private collections of Oceanic art assembled in the twentieth century. Representative of the wide range of arts from the Pacific regions and with historic provenance, the collection's greatest strengths lie in the areas of Polynesia and Melanesia, and includes objects from Micronesia and Australia. Among the key works: a superb eighteenth-century Hawaiian drum collected by Captain James Cook in 1778, an Easter Islands dance paddle, and a hermaphrodite ancestor figure. The acquisition substantially broadens LACMA's permanent collection and also underscores the museum's commitment to collecting and exhibiting works of art from underrepresented areas of the world.

"In our efforts to become a truly world museum with a Los Angeles point of view, acquiring art of the Pacific islands is essential—and this acquisition is a landmark event," said LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director Michael Govan. "Previously, LACMA owned only a handful of Oceanic objects, but with this strategic initiative we now boast one of the finest such collections in the nation."

Purchase of the forty-six rare and historic masterworks from the Pacific Islands—on view for the first time in Los Angeles in February 2009—was made possible with a generous \$5 million challenge grant from The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation. LACMA trustees Jane and Terry Semel, David Bohnett, Camilla Chandler Frost, and Gayle and Ed Roski funded the balance of the acquisition. “Edye and I are delighted to join other trustees in ensuring the artwork of the Pacific regions will be displayed in the context of the other outstanding collections that make up LACMA,” said Eli Broad. “We are thrilled that the trustees accepted our challenge and have devoted resources to this transformative purchase.” The Broads have contributed more than \$65 million to LACMA over the past three years; with this contribution, they have now given or purchased more than fifty works for the museum.

In addition to objects collected by Captain Cook, two works from Rapanui (Easter Island) are among the most intriguing in the collection—a *moai kavakava* (male ancestor figure) and *rapa* (dance paddle), both carved around 1800. The ancestor figure was collected *in situ* by Lieutenant Roberts Sayers, HMS *Thetis*, in 1830. A striking New Ireland *uli* (hermaphrodite ancestor figure) was one of two acquired by the Linden Museum, Stuttgart, in 1906. An extremely rare mid-nineteenth century wicker shield with inlay of shell and parinarium nut paste from Santa Isabel in the Solomon Islands depicts human forms and is the most important of its type.

The acquisition of these extraordinary works, with their broad range of geographic distribution, exceptionally high level of quality, and distinguished provenance, is part of LACMA’s ongoing initiative to collect art from underrepresented regions of the world and to consider it within the context of the museum’s vast encyclopedic collection. In so doing, LACMA becomes one of only a few other museums exhibiting substantial holdings of Oceanic art in the country, including the de Young Museum in San Francisco; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Honolulu Academy of Arts and the Bishop Museum, Honolulu; and the Saint Louis Museum of Art.

The impact of Oceanic works of art has been substantial, and had a

particularly profound effect on modern artists, including expressionists. To demonstrate the connection, a Solomon Islands ceremonial shield from the newly acquired collection is now on view in the exhibition *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: Selections from the Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies*. Timothy O. Benson, curator in LACMA's Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies, said "Thanks to the acquisition of this rare and truly outstanding group of works, we are able to exhibit a critical chapter of modernism as never before. I am pleased to be able to present such a striking example as the ceremonial shield coming from the very museum in Dresden where leading expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner spent many months exploring the collection. Viewing Kirchner's work in context of the shield underscores the deep connection between Oceanic art and the new direction taken by expressionism and various other modernist movements."

Oceanic works also profoundly affected dada and surrealist artists, writers, and scholars from the early twentieth century. Individuals such as Tristan Tzara, Man Ray, Max Ernst, André Breton, and Paul Eluard focused on the powerful forces of the natural world depicted in the art of Oceania. This affinity between Oceanic and modern art was explored in the landmark exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art in 1984, *Primitivism in 20th Century Art*. LACMA's new collection bears important evidence of this connection with a Torres Strait Islands *warup* (hand drum) from Papua New Guinea, known to have been in the collection of Romanian-born poet and founder of the dada movement, Tristan Tzara, after his move to Paris in 1919.

The newly added works, identified for LACMA by Sotheby's, were purchased from the Masco Corporation Foundation. Masco Corporation Foundation provides funding for its charitable activities which include primarily low income housing and arts and cultural activities in Southeast Michigan. The entire collection was displayed at The Kimbell Museum of Art, the Honolulu Academy of Arts, The Detroit Institute of Arts, and the North Carolina Museum of Art during the mid-90s in a touring exhibition, *Island Ancestors, Oceanic Art from the Masco Collection*.

**Credit:** This collection was purchased with funds provided by The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation with additional funding by Jane and Terry Semel, the David Bohnett Foundation, Camilla Chandler Frost, Gayle and Edward P. Roski, and The Ahmanson Foundation.

**About LACMA**

Since its inception in 1965, LACMA has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography—and represent Los Angeles’ uniquely diverse population. Today, the museum features particularly strong collections of Asian, Latin American, European, and American art, as well as a new contemporary museum on its campus, BCAM. With this expanded space for contemporary art, innovative collaborations with artists, and an ongoing transformation project, LACMA is creating a truly modern lens through which to view its rich encyclopedic collection.

**General Information:** LACMA is located at 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. For more information about LACMA and its programming, call 323 857-6000 or visit [lacma.org](http://lacma.org).

**Museum Hours and Admission:** Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, noon-8 pm; Friday, noon-9 pm; Saturday and Sunday, 11 am-8 pm; closed Wednesday. Adults \$12; students 18+ with ID and senior citizens 62+ \$8; children 17 and under are admitted free. Admission (except to specially ticketed exhibitions) is free the second Tuesday of every month and on Target Free Holiday Mondays. After 5 pm, every day the museum is open, LACMA’s “Pay What You Wish” program encourages visitors to support the museum with an admission fee of their choosing.

**Images (page 1)**

(Left) Rapanui Male Ancestor Figure (moai kavakava) (detail), Easter Island circa 1800, wood, bird bone, obsidian, traces of red pigment, 17 ¼ inches, photo © 2008 Museum Associates/LACMA

(Right) Solomon Ceremonial Shield (detail), Solomon Islands, Santa Isabel Island, circa 1800. basketry, parinarium nut paste, shell inlay, black and red pigment, 36 ¼ inches, photo © 2008 Museum Associates/LACMA

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