

## CONTENT AREA 9

# The Pacific

700–1980 C.E.

**ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 9-1.** *The arts of the Pacific vary by virtue of ecological situations, social structure, and impact of external influences, such as commerce, colonialism, and missionary activity. Created in a variety of media, Pacific arts are distinguished by the virtuosity with which materials are used and presented.*

- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 9-1a.** The Pacific region — including over 25,000 islands, about 1,500 of which are inhabited — is defined by its location within the Pacific Ocean, which comprises one third of the Earth's surface. Pacific arts are objects and events created from fibers, pigments, bone, sea ivory and shell, tortoise shell, as well as wood, coral, and stone, which are carried, exchanged, and used by peoples of the region.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 9-1b.** Geological and archaeological evidence indicates that Papuan-speaking peoples traveled across a land bridge that connected Asia and present-day Australia about 30,000 years ago. Lapita people migrated eastward across the region beginning 4,000 years ago. The region was explored by Europeans as early as the 16th century and most extensively from the second half of the 18th century. By the beginning of the 19th century, Dumont d'Urville had divided the region into three units: micro- (small), poly- (many), and mela- (black) nesia (island). The lands are continental, volcanic, and atollian. Each supports distinct ecologies that exist in relation to the migrations and sociocultural systems that were transported across the region.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 9-1c.** Objects such as shields, ancestral representations, and family treasures were and continue to be constructed to give form to and preserve human history and social continuity. Other art forms are constructed to be displayed and performed to remind people of their heritage and shared bonds (such as the significance of an ancestor or leader) and are intended to be destroyed once the memory is created.

**ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 9-2.** *The sea is ubiquitous as a theme of Pacific art and as a presence in the daily lives of a large portion of Oceania, as the sea both connects and separates the lands and peoples of the Pacific.*

- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 9-2a.** In the last 4,000 years, populations sailed from Vanuatu eastward, and carried plants, animals, and pottery that now demonstrate a pattern of migration and connection from what was the Lapita culture. By 800 C.E. the distribution that has come to be described as Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia was established.

- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 9-2b.** Ships and devices of navigation and sailing expertise were built and used to promote exploration, migration, and the exchange of objects and cultural patterns across the Pacific. Navigators created personal charts or expressions of the truths of their experience of the sea and other objects intended to protect and ensure the success of sailing. Ocean-going vessels carried families, and often communities, across vast distances; passengers could also return to their place of departure.

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**ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 9-3.** *The arts of the Pacific are expressions of beliefs, social relations, essential truths, and compendia of information held by designated members of society. Pacific arts are objects, acts, and events that are forces in social life.*

- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 9-3a.** Arts of the Pacific involve the power and forces of deities, ancestors, founders, and hereditary leaders, as well as symbols of primal principles, which are protected by wrapping, sheathing, and other forms of covering to prevent human access. Ritual dress, forms of armor, and tattoos encase and shield the focus of power from human interaction. One's vital force, identity, or strength (*mana*) is expressed and protected by rules and prohibitions, as well as by wrapping or shielding practices, or *tapu*. *Mana* is also associated with communities and leaders who represent their peoples. Objects that project status and sustain structure hold and become *mana*. These objects are made secure through *tapu* or behaviors that limit access to and protect the objects.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 9-3b.** Rulers of the Sayudeleur Dynasty commanded construction of Nan Madol in Micronesia, a residential and ceremonial complex of numerous human-made islets. Rulers of Hawaii were clothed in feather capes that announce their status and shield them from contact. Societies of Polynesia in New Zealand, Rapa Nui, and Samoa create sacred ceremonial spaces that both announce and contain their legitimacy, power, and life force. In Melanesia, individuals and clans earn status and power and sustain social balance in a set of relationships marked by the exchange of objects. Masks, and the performance of masks, are a recital and commemoration of ancestors' histories and wisdom.

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**ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 9-4.** *Pacific arts are performed (danced, sung, recited, displayed) in an array of colors, scents, textures, and movements that enact narratives and proclaim primordial truths. Belief in the use of costumes, cosmetics, and constructions assembled to enact epics of human history and experience is central to the creation of and participation in Pacific arts.*

- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 9-4a.** Objects and behaviors in the cultures of the Pacific are often designed and presented to stimulate a particular response. Rare and precious materials are used to demonstrate wealth, status, and particular circumstance. Ritual settings are structured with elements that address all of the senses. Physical combat and warfare are announced and preceded by displays of ferocity in dress, dance, verbal aggression, and gestural threats.

- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 9-4b.** The acts of creation, performance, and even destruction of a mask, costume, or installation often carry the meaning of the work of art (instead of the object itself carrying the meaning). Meaning is communicated at the time of the work's appearance, as well as in the future when the work, or the context of its appearance, is recalled. This sort of memory is evoked through the presentation of primordial forms such as cultural heroes, founding ancestors, or totemic animals in order to reaffirm shared values and important truths. In some instances the memory is created and performed, and then the objects that appeared in those processes are destroyed, leaving a new iteration of the memory.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 9-4c.** Reciprocity is demonstrated by cycles of exchange in which designated people and communities provide specific items and in exchange receive equally predictable items. The process of exchange is complex and prescribed. Chants, dances, scents, costumes, and people of particular lineage and social position are called into play to create a performance that engages all of the senses and expands the form and significance of the exchange.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 9-4d.** Duality and complementarity are aspects of social relations that are often characterized by opposing forces or circumstances and express the balance of relations necessary between those seemingly divergent forces. Gender, for example, is the basis for inclusion in some societies but is understood in the context of complement rather than opposition. Spatial organization, shared spaces, and exclusive or rarified spaces are created and used to reinforce social order.

## Image Set

**213. Nan Madol.** Pohnpei, Micronesia. Saudeleur Dynasty. c. 700–1600 C.E. Basalt boulders and prismatic columns. (2 images)



Nan Madol

© Jack Fields/Corbis



Nan Madol

© Jack Fields/Corbis

**214. Moai on platform (ahu).** Rapa Nui (Easter Island). c. 1100–1600 C.E. Volcanic tuff figures on basalt base.



Moai

© Peter Langer/Design Pics/Corbis

**215. ‘Ahu ‘ula (feather cape).** Hawaiian. Late 18th century C.E. Feathers and fiber.



‘Ahu ‘ula

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**216. Staff god.** Rarotonga, Cook Islands, central Polynesia. Late 18th to early 19th century C.E. Wood, tapa, fiber, and feathers. (3 images)



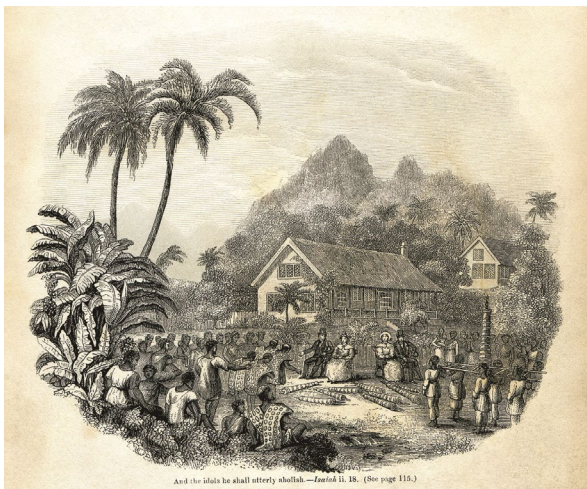
Staff god

© The Trustees of the British Museum



Detail

© The Trustees of the British Museum



Contextual image: staff god

© The Trustees of the British Museum

**217. Female deity.** Nukuoro, Micronesia. c. 18th to 19th century C.E. Wood.



Female deity

© Werner Forman Archive/The Bridgeman Art Library



**218. Buk (mask).** Torres Strait. Mid- to late 19th century C.E. Turtle shell, wood, fiber, feathers, and shell.



**Buk**

Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Image source © Art Resource, NY

**219. Hiapo (tapa).** Niue. c. 1850–1900 C.E. Tapa or bark cloth, freehand painting.



**Hiapo**

© Auckland War Memorial Museum/Pacific Collection 1948.34

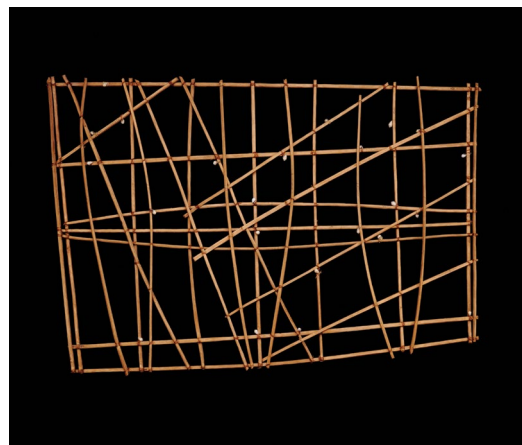
**220. Tamati Waka Nene.** Gottfried Lindauer. 1890 C.E. Oil on canvas.



**Tamati Waka Nene**

© Corbis

**221. Navigation chart.** Marshall Islands, Micronesia. 19th to early 20th century C.E. Wood and fiber.



**Navigation chart**

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**222. Malagan display and mask.** New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea. c. 20th century C.E. Wood, pigment, fiber, and shell. (2 images)



Malagan mask

University Museum, Pennsylvania, PA, USA/Photo © AISA/The Bridgeman Art Library



Malagan display

© Peter Horner, 1978 © Museum der Kulturen Basel, Switzerland

**223. Presentation of Fijian mats and tapa cloths to Queen Elizabeth II.** Fiji, Polynesia. 1953 C.E. Multimedia performance (costume; cosmetics, including scent; chant; movement; and *pandanus* fiber/hibiscus fiber mats), photographic documentation.



Presentation of Fijian mats and tapa cloths to Queen Elizabeth II during the 1953-4 royal tour

Courtesy of Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand