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Sotheby's to Sell Treasures : The Frum Collection of Oceanic Art

The Most Important Selection of Oceanic to Appear
on the Market for the Last Thirty Years



Paris, April 2014 - The superb collection of Oceanic art from Polynesia and Melanesia formed by the late Murray Frum and his family is the most significant group to come to market in the last thirty years with a variety of objects from across the island nations at all ranges of the market. Sotheby's is honored to offer this collection for sale in Paris on **16 September 2014**.

The Collection of approximately 70 works contains a rich variety of exceptionally rare objects with distinguished provenance. Unique in these times are the group of pre-contact Polynesian pieces, which form the heart of the collection. There are simply no comparable examples of many of these objects on the current market.

Frum and his family were fortunate to be buying with the eye of a great connoisseur over the past 50 years, and through the period when many great objects first appeared on the international market. The first half of the 20th century was a 'golden age' for collectors of Oceanic art, with an abundance of objects which has been collected during the 18th and 19th centuries by missionaries, travellers and colonial officials becoming available to those collectors with the prescience to appreciate their importance. The names of the most celebrated of these collectors feature prominently in the Frum Collection as distinguished, historical provenance: **James Hooper (1897-1971) the great British collection, Harry Beasley (1861-19390, and Kenneth Webster (1906-1967) early British dealers of ethnographic material, the great British artist and collector, Jacob Epstein (1880-1959).**

At the same time the acquisitive zeal of German and Central European Museums in the 19th and 20th century, fuelled by expeditions to these regions, gathered tremendous numbers of pre-contact objects. The Frum collection is distinguished by Melanesian objects in particular from New Guinea and New Ireland, which had been de-accessioned from the Volkerkunde museums in Vienna, Stuttgart, and Budapest, giving a glimpse into the richness of their cultural holding and an idea of the complex visual vocabulary of the art from these island nations.

Murray Frum (1931-2013) was a Canadian real estate developer. His parents had emigrated to Canada from Poland in 1930, and he grew up in Canada. It was a visit to New York in the late 1950s to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York that sparked his passion for collecting. During this visit, he was able to buy a duplicate Egyptian standing figure from the Met's collection. The idea for Murray and his wife that you could own a work of art which was several hundred years old was astonishing. Over the next fifty years, he assembled an extraordinarily diverse collection of African, Oceanic, Pre-Columbian, Silver, Art Deco, and Renaissance art as well as Canadian paintings.

Murray became known not only for his discerning eye and tremendous curiosity about the objects which he displayed elegantly in his home which he built with the modernist architects (Ron Thom, Brigitte Shim and Howard Sutcliffe), but he was also a tremendously generous philanthropic man. He loaned objects from his collection around the world, and his African collection was published and exhibited in 1980 by the great African art curator, William Fagg, ex-keeper of the British Museum. In addition, he gave part of his African art collection to the Art Gallery of Ontario as well as the glorious Bernini sculpture (*Corpus*, around 1650). His deliberate choice of the Art Gallery for his collection demonstrated Frum's deep conviction that tribal art should be considered as art, and not as ethnographical specimens.

Highlights of the collection

Head of a Staff God, Rarotonga, Cook Islands

This magnificent sculpture is a sacred object from one of the rarest sculptural traditions in Polynesia. Formerly in the James Hooper Collection, it is the upper part of a large staff, which would have measured around 12 feet in length. The missionary John Williams claims to have destroyed the majority of these images during his time on Rarotonga between 1827-1828. Only twenty staff gods survived the early 19th century missionary presence on this small island, and most are today in museums. The Frum staff god is the first of this quality to come to auction in nearly 20 years.

Figure, tiki, Maori, New Zealand

Nearly all large scale Maori figures were made as part of a gable ornament or interior structure for a building. Only six free standing Maori figures in the round are known and the Frum figure is the only example in private hands (others are in the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow, the Sainsbury Centre, Norwich, and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington). These free standing figures, like the post figures, decorated with specific scarification patterns, were amongst the most important three-dimensional objects for the Maori in traditional times as they were a link to the power of their ancestors.



Memorial Figure, Uli, New Ireland

According to the German ethnologist Augustin Krämer, who visited New Ireland between 1907 and 1909 to learn about the use and purpose of uli figures, these imposing sculptures were ancestral images of clan leaders, used during important ceremonies. The cultural context that surrounded the production and use of uli figures was already dying out when Krämer was there in 1909, and had ceased entirely by 1914. The Frum uli, carved in enormous scale, and including the presentation of a smaller figure to the front, was collected in the second half of the 19th century. As a duplicate in the famous Linden Museum in Stuttgart, it was traded in the early part of the century to the important early German collector in this field, Ernst Heinrich, later passing to the Swiss surrealist painter and sculptor Serge Brignoni

'Dancing' Figure, imunu, Papuan Gulf, Papua New Guinea

This wonderfully expressive figure was collected by the Swiss anthropologist Paul Wirz (1892-1955), during his 1929-1931 research trip to the Papuan Gulf. Imunu are unique spirit figures, created from the root of a mangrove. A carver or spirit-man would have dreamt of this image and then gone to 'find' it in the mangrove forest. The Frum figure as exhibited in the Landmark exhibition in New York at the Gallery Jan Krugier, where it was shown in contrast to modern art in 2012.

Fly-Whisk Handle, Rurutu or Tubua'i, Austral Islands

This important figurative fly whisk handle is a masterpiece of small scale carving from Central Polynesian. The sculpture has a distinguished history, probably collected by the missionary George Bennet in the early 1820s on his trip to Central Polynesia. He gave many of the objects he collected on this voyage to the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, from whence this came. There has not been another fly whisk from the Austral Islands at auction of this quality since Frum bought this example from the James Hooper auction in the 1970s.

Club, 'akatarā, Rarotonga or Atiu, Cook Islands

Formerly in the James Hooper collection, this is a superb example of the most iconic type of Polynesian club. These clubs were first described in 1777, by the naturalist William Anderson, who travelled on Captain Cook's Third Voyage: 'The clubs were about six feet long or more, made of a hard black wood lance shaped at the end but much broader, with the edge nicely scollop'd and the whole neatly polished'.

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