

MANA[★]

Ornament And Adornment From The Pacific

Cuming Museum
February 28 to July 15



Discover the importance of jewellery, dress and body adornment to the people of the Pacific. And the strong links between craft skills and power, status and celebration.

Mana reveals beautiful 18th and 19th century objects from the Cuming collection. It also showcases contemporary pieces of jewellery inspired by the museum collection and produced by young women from Southwark.

Please note that this will be your last chance to see an exhibition in our current venue. The Cuming Museum will close from July 18 2006 and will reopen at our new venue 151 Walworth Road in late September 2006 in time for our centenary celebrations.

The Cuming Museum Pacific Collection

The Cuming Museum Pacific collection includes objects collected by the Cuming family in the early 19th Century together with donations to the museum just after it opened in 1906. Most of the items haven't been displayed since 1940. Some items, such as the bark cloth and mats, have never been displayed.

The Cuming family purchased their collection from auctions and sales, often of older museums in London. Some objects were brought to England after the early European voyages to the Pacific region in the late 18th century. These include items collected during the second and third voyages of Captain James Cook, between 1772 and 1780. They also include textiles brought back by Captain Wilson after the missionary voyage of the ship the *Duff* in 1799. These were donated to the museum by one of his descendents in 1906.

See more of the Cuming collection on the online database
www.southwarkcollections.org.uk.

Introduction To The Pacific

The objects in this exhibition are from regions called Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia.

Melanesia includes the islands of Papua New Guinea (Irian Jaya), the Solomon Islands, New Caladonia, Vanuatu and Australia. **Micronesia** is made up of scattered islands north of Melanesia including Yap and Chuuk. **Polynesia** covers a large triangle of the Pacific Ocean with Easter Island in the East, New Zealand in the South and Hawai'i in the North.

The Pacific region combines two rich cultures – the Papuan speaking people of Melanesia and the Austronesian speaking people originally from Indonesia and the Philippines.

Papuan people first settled in Melanesia 30 000 years ago. People from Indonesia and the Philippines travelled through Melanesia to settle in Polynesia 5000 years ago. They brought their traditions and tools with them including tattooing combs, cloth beaters and fish hooks. Many of these traditions became mixed up with the Papuan culture, as they passed through the area.

People from Polynesian islands such as Fiji made epic sea journeys to settle in more distant places.

Families travelled in canoes. They carried seeds and plant cuttings of food crops such as banana, coconut and breadfruit. They took animals including pigs, dogs and fowls. Places they reached include Hawaii and Easter Island. They settled on New Zealand around 1000 years ago. Waves of migration took place at different times from different islands. Some islands developed very distinctive traditions – but all have a unifying Polynesian culture.

Most objects in the exhibition are between 150 and 200 years old. The Cuming family collected them because they illustrated cultures very different to their own.

Ornament And Adornment of the Pacific

Within traditional Pacific cultures, jewellery, clothing and skin decoration are more than simply fashion. Adornment can express ethnic and social identity, rank and wealth.

Adornments are made from natural materials found locally or traded across vast distances. Materials used include shell, bone, teeth, seeds, wood, stone, feathers and fur and cordage made from plant fibres. Materials with *Mana*; whale and dogteeth, precious red feathers, human hair and greenstone could only be worn by people of high rank. Important objects were passed down through families, acquiring more *Mana* as they became connected with the stories and exploits of ancestors who owned them.

Adornments and ornaments are worn as everyday items but have a special role for celebrations and events. Garments made of fibre and bark cloth function more as ornaments than as clothing and are presented as gifts at important events.

MANA is a quality which relates to sacredness (*tapu*). It is more than simply power or status and is acquired through a person's actions. It can be expressed through a person's skills and temperament. A skilled craftsman can give MANA to a finely made object, especially an object which will be worn by a high ranking person.

Tattooing originates from the Pacific. Tattoos give status and tattooing is carried out as an initiation into adulthood. The tattoo also acts as a seal or protection for the body and almost serves as clothing. More temporary designs are applied using natural paints such as turmeric powder and oil, especially for dancing.

People also adorn themselves with flowers and plants. Married women traditionally wear a flower in their hair. More elaborate ornaments are made for festivals and dances. Today they are made from plastic. All are discarded once worn.

The Importance Of Making

The craftsman making high status ornaments and garments has an important social, ceremonial and ritual role in many Pacific societies.

Many of the rituals relating to weddings, investiture of chiefs and funerals revolve around the wearing and presentation of fine mats, bark cloth (*tapa*) and other objects of adornment. In the past, some objects were only produced by high status makers and under carefully controlled circumstances. Ordinary people could be punished for owning or even touching high status materials such as sacred red feathers.

The maker is responsible for giving the finished item MANA. MANA can be added through the selection of materials. It is also given through the sacredness (*tapu*) of the process and the personal conduct of the maker. The maker inherits patterns and techniques from ancestral spirits. By respecting and acknowledging these spirits, the maker adds MANA. Finally, the presentation of the finished piece is also important for MANA.

Today, women are the guardians of many traditions in the Pacific including the production of bark cloth. Traditionally, women have always made fine pandana mats and bark cloth (*tapa*). The mats are produced by groups of women who come together socially to produce them. The very large bark cloth mats are made and decorated for special occasions. Women form strong societies to work together and celebrate the completion of finished pieces.

The Contemporary Craft Project

"I think this programme is educational and helps you with creative skills. Also you get to find out about different backgrounds and see jewellery from different countries. I enjoyed the programme because it helped me create jewellery which I never knew I could do"
-Nisha Harewood

A group of five young women from Southwark have participated in workshops at the museum to create contemporary jewellery inspired by the museum's historic collection. They learnt various techniques and designed and selected their final pieces for display in the exhibition.

The workshops were run by Southwark-based artist Rosanna Raymond. Through her knowledge of Pacific cultures, Rosanna has brought a new passion and understanding to the historic collection. Her work with the young women has given them new skills, and has opened up the museum collection to new vision and creativity.

"Through the Pacific Horizons project I have been able to share aspects of my cultural heritage and watch these young women tap into their creative energy and produce many beautiful pieces of jewellery." - Rosanna Raymond

Rosanna Raymond Artist Biography

"I feel a strong bond to my ancestors when I meet "artefacts" in museum collections. A direct line (whakapapa) of communication opens up, the past becomes present."

Rosanna Raymond is a performance/installation/body adornment artist and writer. She is a New Zealander of Samoan decent, currently living and working in Southwark with her family.

Raymond has forged a role for herself over the past 15 years as a producer and commentator on contemporary Pacific Island culture, fusing traditional Pacific practises with modern innovations and techniques. She is co-curating the 2006 Pasifika Styles exhibition celebrating 21st century New Zealand Maori and Pacific art for the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

A 'Tusitala' (a teller of tales) at heart her work takes a variety of forms ranging from installation works, spoken words and body adornment, with works held in Museum and private collections around the world.