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MASTERPIECES FROM NEW GUINEA: WORKS OF ART FROM THE JOLIKA COLLECTION AT THE FINE ARTS MUSEUMS OF SAN FRANCISCO TO BE SOLD AT CHRISTIE’S PARIS

Benefitting Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco’s Acquisition Fund
-- Single Owner Sale Will Be Held in Paris on 19 June 2013 --
-- Highlights To Be Shown In Paris 18 – 23 March --
-- Highlights To Be Shown In New York 3-15 May --

Paris – Christie’s is pleased to present an exceptional sale of Masterpieces of New Guinea from The Jolika Collection at The Fine Arts Museums Of San Francisco on June 19. This highly curated selection of fifteen works of art represent the wide, sophisticated geographic and stylistic spectrum of New Guinea artistic production.

“It is an amazing opportunity for New guinea works of such quality to come to market. For some of the rarest examples, we will not see works like this available again for another generation, if ever” stated Susan Kloman, International director of the department.
The Jolika Collection represents one of the single greatest collecting achievements in the art world, brilliantly cultivated over four decades by Marcia and John Friede. It is a unique collection, which comprises nearly 400 works, and is acknowledged to be one of the most important art museum collections of New Guinea works of art with respect to both quality and depth. The Jolika Collection, named for the first letters of John and Marcia Friede’s three children (John, Lisa and Karen), was documented in a dedicated two-volume book and has been on view to the public in a breath-taking display since 2005 at the deYoung Museum of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco in a superbly appointed museum space. Proceeds from the sale will benefit the Fine Arts Museums acquisition fund.

The selection is led by a powerful and extremely rare ceremonial house finial figure carved by the Biwat (Mundugamor) people of the middle Sepik river Yuat River region. The Biwat people are celebrated for the virtuosity of their carvings from the famous flute-stopper figures to the monumental ancestor figures such as the iconic example from the Beyeler Collection in Basel. The Jolika Biwat figure is exceedingly rare as one of only three known examples of this quality – one in the Cambridge Museum of Art and Archaeology and another in the Barbier-Mueller Collection. These roof sculptures depicting a crouching male figure represent the mythical hero Bilishoi who had taken refuge on the rooftop of a house.

The Jolika figure is an exceptional example, with its captivating expression and fascinating combination of a man/insect, the strong positive and negative volumes are punctuated by the point-counterpoint of the M-shaped legs and W-shaped arms. Particularly notable is the vitality of the strength of the remaining pigment which highlight the painterly surface. The figure would have sat near the top the men’s ceremonial house, shaded by a palm-spathe awning. This figure entered the Friede Collection after having been housed for years at the Melbourne Savage Club, a gentleman’s club named for the 18th century poet Richard Savage; the name also served as a double-entendre for the Bohemian spirit of the club’s founders.

Highlights of the selection in the June auction includes a Middle Sepik River Suspension Hook. The Hook Figure was formerly in the collection of the ground-breaking, avant-garde art dealer, Pierre Loeb, who had a world-class collection of New Guinea art as early at the 1920’s in Paris. A major Parisian dealer of Modern art, the Surrealist artists he represented, such as Max Ernst, Loeb held a fascination for the works of art from New Guinea and subsidized a mission by the artist, Jacques Viot, to explore and acquire works of art.
After Loeb, the sculpture then passed to the collection of Henri Kamer, who exhibited it in Cannes in 1957; later, it was shown in a landmark exhibition devoted to Sepik River Art in the United States at the Chicago Institute of Art in 1971. The abstract and curvilinear form reveals a multitude of human and bird spirit forms. Having been in Pierre Loeb’s collection, this is precisely the artistic essence which inspired the artists he represented in the period between the wars, not only Ernst, but Picasso, Miró and Giacometti, as well.

Another extraordinary sculpture from this selection is an Upper Sepik River carving in the form of a Hornbill Bird, formerly in the collection of Douglas Newton, the celebrated collector, scholar and curator. Newton was curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, preceded by his work as curator, then director, of the Museum of Primitive Art, the Museum created by Nelson Rockefeller and dedicated to the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas. As a scholar, he traveled many times to New Guinea. His great taste and eye for design, led to some of the most innovative exhibitions of so-called primitive art ever seen.

This rare carving of a bird likely served as a finial for a mask representing a water spirit. These types of masks were worn in the dances of the Mbangk ceremonies once a year during the dry season. This Jolika carving compares most closely to the finial of another mask, also formerly in the collection of Douglas Newton now in the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. The strength of this image through economical use of line and volume, with a graphic painterly surface, to create this enigmatic representation of a spirit-bird demonstrates the intelligent range of New Guinea artistic sensibility.
Sale: On Wednesday 19th June 2013
Christie’s Paris: 9 avenue Matignon, 75008 Paris

Exhibition at Christie’s Paris: From March 18th to March 23rd - 9 avenue Matignon, 75008 Paris
Exhibition at Christie’s New York: From May 3rd to May 15th – 20 Rockefeller Plaza New York, NY 10020

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*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer’s premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer’s or seller’s credits.

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