

SCULPTURE OF THE EASTERN SOLOMONS

By WILLIAM H. DAVENPORT

With the special exhibition from the Eastern Solomon Islands (December 8 - May 31) the University Museum presents a new collection of primitive art which was obtained from the field. Also, the relevant background and contextual information for the collection was recorded. This is a happy, but all too rare, situation, for most collections of primitive art have been assembled from objects that were originally obtained either as curios or for their visual impact alone; their functions, meanings, and the circumstances of their manufacture were not recorded or at best were recorded incompletely. Moreover, in most cases it is now too late to retrieve this related information, for in the processes of culture change and accommodation stimulated by the overpowering influence from industrial sections of the world most primitive societies have allowed their traditions of aesthetic expression to die.

The tradition of art in the Solomons lives, literally, on borrowed time. Although it continues in some communities it no longer flourishes throughout the archipelago as it did fifty years ago. The time is close when it will be preserved only in museums, private collections, libraries, and archives located far from the South Seas. Today most Pacific Island peoples have either already cast aside much of their traditional culture or they are in the process of doing so. The Pacific has become a part of the modern world.

For two centuries Europeans have regarded the South Seas with contrasts of imagery. In the last century the uninhibited, gentle yet unrepentant Polynesians of the central Pacific were contrasted with the savage, contentious Melanesians of the southwest Pacific. In this century the lure of the tranquil life amidst reefs, lagoons, and tropical vegetation on islands with catchy names like Borabora and Pukapuka has been set against

the horror of modern war on inhospitable islands with incongruous names such as Guadalcanal and Bougainville. Even at this moment the islands present to us simultaneously the pictures of luxurious modernity in tourist Hawaii and the last remnants of true Stone Age peoples in interior New Guinea—the two, moreover, connected by scheduled air service. The South Seas, as always, offer an exotic geographic and social setting upon which Europeans can project their fantasies of withdrawal.

In recent years still another interest in South Seas cultures has developed, and this is even influencing our tastes in small ways. This interest is in the plastic arts and particularly in the many traditions of sculpture that come from Oceania. The novelty of forms and the strangeness of the compositions have both attracted and repulsed persons who are interested in modern and contemporary art. Moreover, because of the remoteness of South Seas cultures, the wide gap of incomprehension which separates our culture from those in which the sculptures are produced, and the total anonymity of the artists who created them, we are able to inject our own ideas of art into these objects. As a result most people regard the arts of the South Seas as a kind of expressionism, and by implication, an expressionism in which unknown primitive artists are manipulating forms and ideas largely according to their personal aesthetic tastes just as artists do in our society. The many regional styles that are clearly present in South Sea art are often thought to be analogous to periods or schools in our own art tradition. But this is not the case, and in this article we will attempt to look at *one* of these regional styles—the Eastern Solomons—from another point of view. As best we can we will try to convey it as the people of that culture see it.



(Left) Figure supporting a bowl, Western Solomon style. Late 19th century, sculptor unknown.



(Right) Portrait figure of a man wearing ornaments for dancing, Eastern Solomon style. Sculptor: Tigoana of Star Harbour, San Cristobal Island.

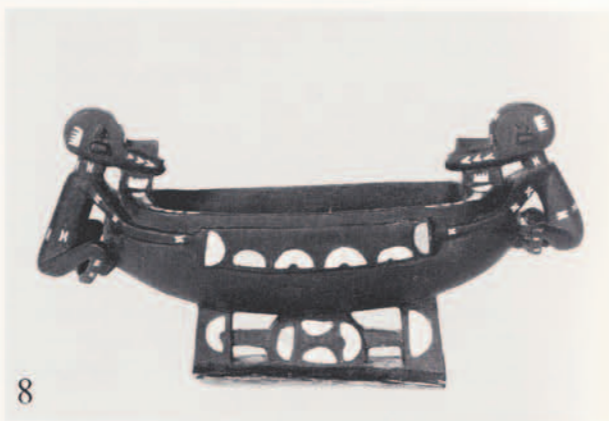
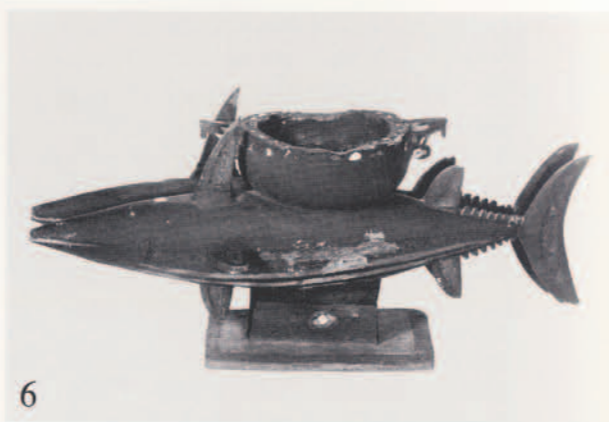
For many years a Solomon Islands art style has been recognized, and because many examples of it are in museum collections two sorts of objects have come to represent this style. One of these consists of humanoid figures, sometimes full-figure sometimes head and arms only, with a canine-like snout. The other is a composition of naturalistic birds or fish, separately and together, carved as the ends or supports of oval bowls. The former are religious icons that were fastened to large canoes, the latter are ritual offering bowls used in the worship of tutelary deities. Both kinds of objects are of wood, usually stained black, and often liberally enhanced with inlays of mother-of-pearl or etched details through the dark surface which reveal the light shade of the underlying wood. Small details are often carved in low relief to enrich the surfaces.

To Solomon Islanders these two objects are as different in style significance as are Delft and Chinese Blue and White porcelain to us—the two are historically related, but each represents the product of a different culture. The humanoid sculptures come from the Western Islands of the British Solomons, the bowls come from the Eastern Islands of that group. The peoples of

the two areas speak different languages, are racially quite different, and have different cultures and institutions.

Actually, there is a third lesser-known areal style of sculpture in the Solomons that comes from the Central Islands. It, too, consists of human and animal figures with black (or white) surfaces, sometimes inlaid or etched, but the figures are usually simpler and are rarely built into complex compositions. Rarely, too, are the surfaces of these figures embellished by *bas relief*. In brief, it is a much simpler and reduced style and to European eyes it has little interest when compared with the Eastern and Western styles. Also, this Central sculpture is related to its culture and imbedded in social institutions in quite distinctive ways that are different from these relationships in adjacent areas. Knowing this, the style differences communicate to Solomon Islanders differences in ethnicity.

The visual communication of cultural and social differences can be brought about by still more subtle distinctions. For example, even within one of these three cultural provinces sculpture from the extreme East—from Santa Ana, Santa Catalina, and the Star Harbour area at the



Ritual communion bowls. The separated treatment of supporting scrolls that is preferred by Santa Ana carvers occurs on bowls 2 and 5; the articulated treatment used by Santa Catalina carvers occurs on 12. The same scroll motif is enlarged and elevated at the ends of 4, reduced and repeated under the rims of 6 and 13. The shark of 13 represents a real species; the shark heads of 2, 5, 9, 10, and 12 depict a vicious but imaginary shark species. The bent fish of 1 and 11 is a garfish; the side fish figures of 10 are porpoise; the fatter fish of 3, 6, 9, 10, and 11 are bonito; the birds are species that appear with bonito schools. Anthropomorphic figures represent deities; the double bowl 14 is dedicated to a twin tutelary deity. These bowls range from one to two feet in overall length.

tip of San Cristobal Island, where the objects in the University Museum show were obtained—can be readily differentiated from that of the remainder of San Cristobal and from that of Ulawa Island. Furthermore, on a still more localized level, carvers of Santa Catalina Island treat certain motifs in a way that is different from the way neighboring Santa Ana carvers handle the same motifs on the same kind of objects. An example of this is in the decorative scrolls that both islands use on their ritual bowls. Santa Ana carvers prefer to separate the scrolls from the body of the bowl, while Santa Catalina carvers prefer to keep the scrolls tightly articulated and integrated with the form of the body of the bowl.

(Left)
Figure of a deity
by Tigoana.
(Right)
Figure of a
legendary hero
by Karopungi.



Personal styles within areal and sub-areal styles are just as readily recognized and evaluated. In recent years, for example, the carver in the Eastern Solomons who had the greatest reputation was a man from the Star Harbour area named Tigoana. He died in 1964 and his cousin Karopungi is now regarded by some as his successor. The differences between the two men's work are striking. Most people think Tigoana much superior, but Karopungi has a flair for detail that Tigoana spurned. His low relief panel, carved about twenty-five years ago for a commemorative feast, is a unique and distinguished work. The two cousins each learned from his father who were brothers, and their fathers both learned from their father.

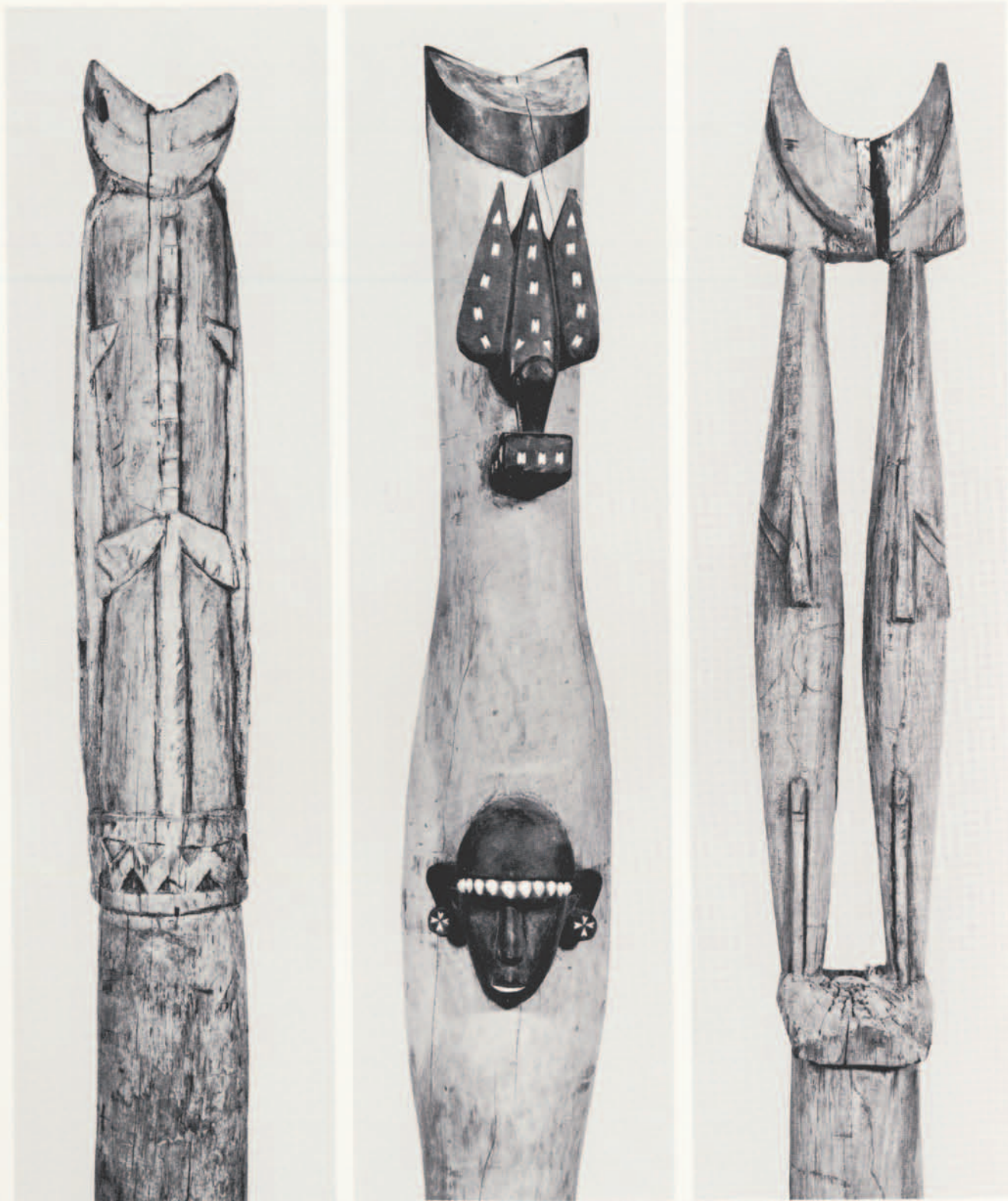
Differences of this sort are just as notable on Santa Ana Island. Reresimae, Sao, Faruara, and Nimanima are all sculptors of note there. The works of the latter two are similar in that they are more formal, more precise, and their compositions are more tightly integrated than the former two. Reresimae and Sao, however, are close friends and admirers of each other's work. As a result of this, they influence each other. Reresimae carved a massive housepost for the University Museum which was not a copy, but which was greatly influenced by a similar post carved by his friend which stands in one of the Santa Ana sacred houses. In carving another post for the Museum collection, Sao returned the compliment of his friend by using a theme that was suggested to him by Reresimae. Some



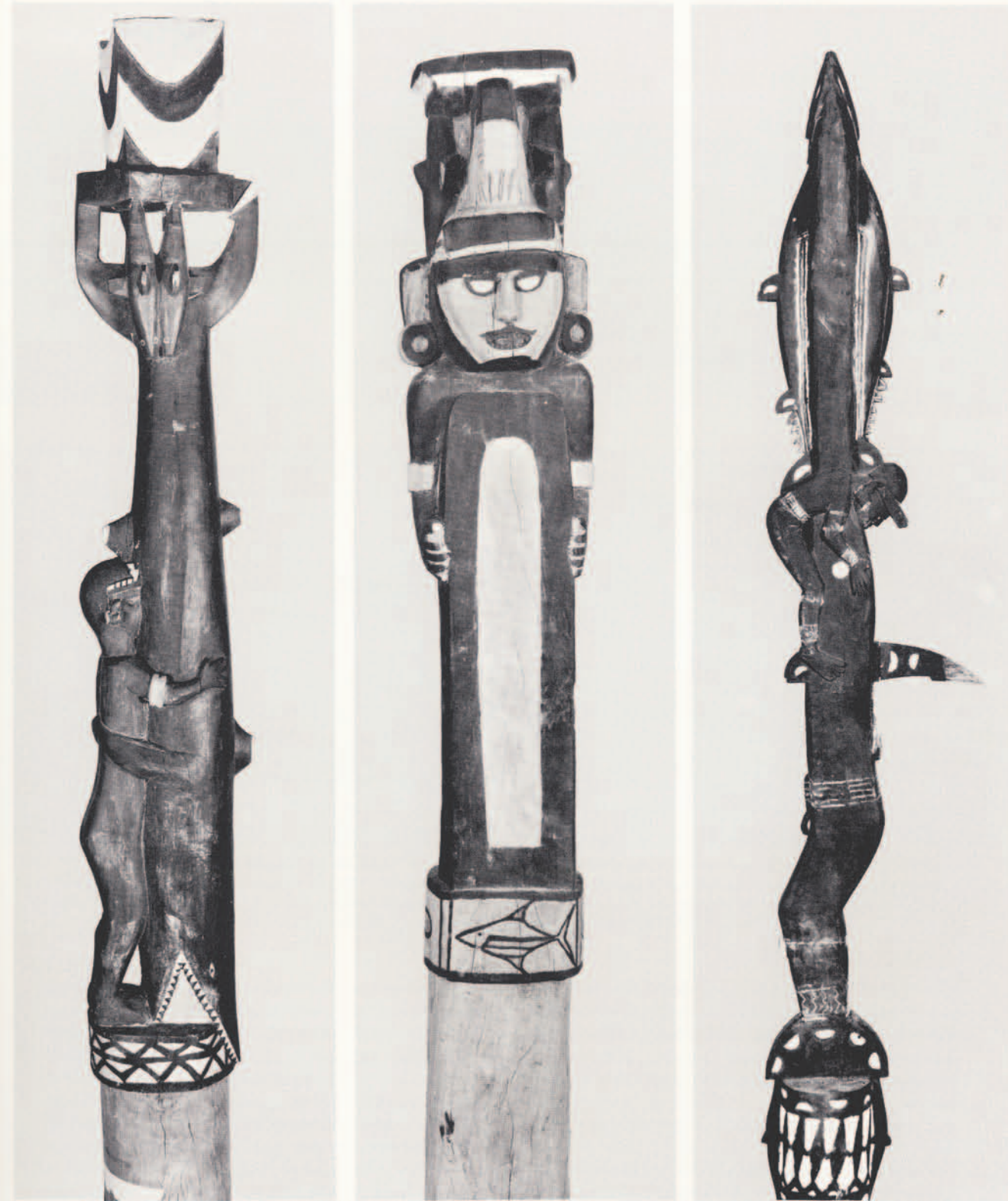
Commemorative house post. Two prostitutes by Karopungi of Star Harbour, San Cristobal. Prostitutes are occasionally brought in from other villages on festive occasions.



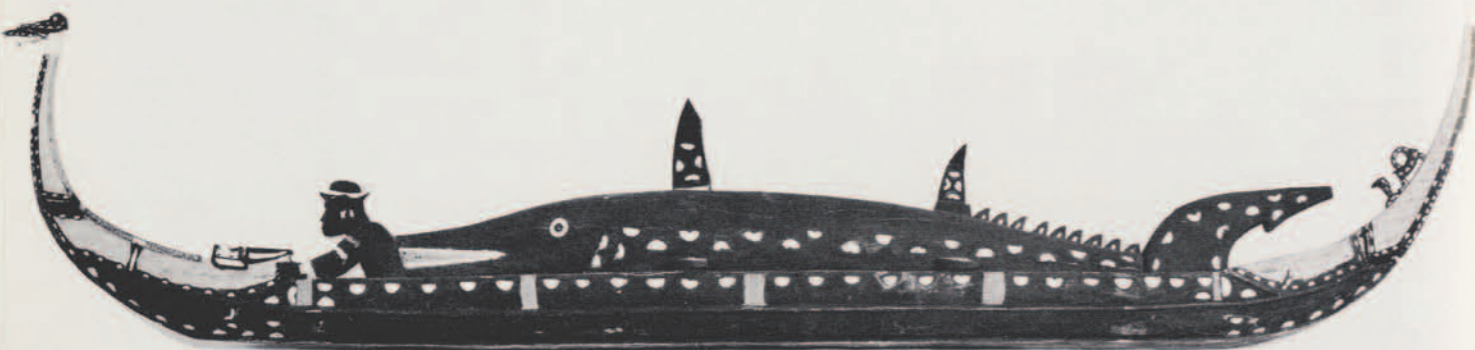
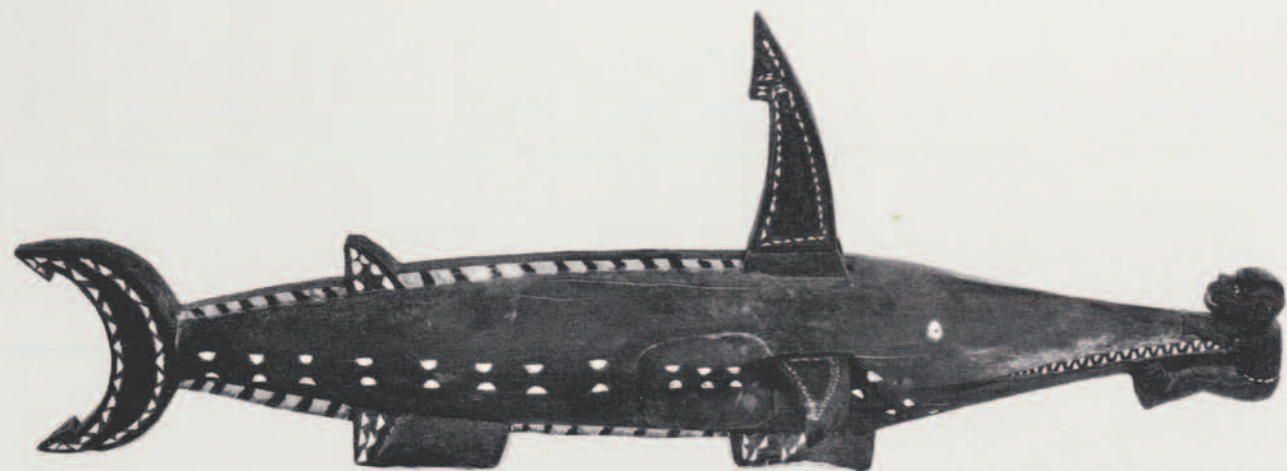
(Left) Canoe house post. Deity Pa-na-waiuu, "Bonito School," by Reresimae of Natagera Village, Santa Ana. (Center) Canoe house post. Deity Mara-Kirio, "Porpoise Changeling," by Sao of Natagera Village, Santa Ana. (Right) Canoe house post. Wakewakemanu by Murisigaie of Gupuna Village, Santa Ana. All of the deities depicted in these posts control the appearance of schools of bonito and tuna as well as the birds and sharks that follow these schools.



(Left) Commemorative house post. Two bonito carved in low relief. Carved by Waifura of Gupuna Village, Santa Ana. (Center) Offering post. The carving is called Qanga, "Swelling," which represents the deity Siqaru, who has powers to make staple crops grow large and to cause and cure diseases whose symptoms include swelling. (Right) Commemorative house post. The same dual bonito theme as on the post at left, but carved in the full round. Sculptor: Murisigaie of Gupuna Village, Santa Ana.



(Left) Canoe house post. The mythical hero Mauri Asi, "Saved at Sea," by Faruara of Natagera Village, Santa Ana. (Center) Canoe house post. The deity Wakewakemanu by Reresimae of Natagera Village, Santa Ana. This conception of the deity has him in fighting stance behind a shield; the conception of the same deity on page 9 right has him holding two garfish which he uses as arrows to shoot death and sickness. (Right) Commemorative house post. The deity Karemanua, who is half man—half shark, killing his human brother. Carved by Nimanima of Gupuna Village, Santa Ana.

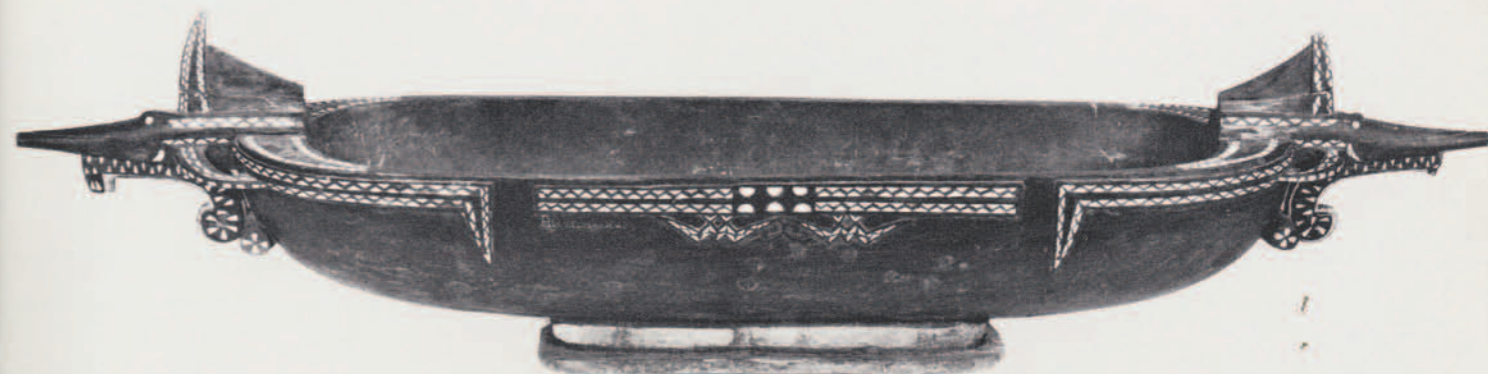


Caskets for the bones of honored dead. (Upper) A shark killing a man which signifies the violent death of the man Okuo a few years back. Carved by Tarofimana of Natagera Village, Santa Ana. (Lower) A shark holding a man signifying the legend of the deity Wauṃauṃa superimposed on a model of bonito fishing canoe. Carved by Nimanima of Gupuna Village, Santa Ana.

of the local criticism of the works of the two men is that they have both been influenced by carvers from Ulawa, an island eighty-five miles to the north, thus their styles are not as "pure" as are works of their competitors, Faruara and Nimanima.

Personal styles of carvers are also revealed in preferences for the kinds of objects carved. Reresimae likes to carve both ritual bowls, which he considers to be a minor sculptural form, and posts, which are considered to be major works. Sao, his friend, has done bowls, but does not like to do them as well as posts. Nimanima will not be bothered with bowls at all.

Personal preferences and evaluations of this order are, for unaccountable historical reasons, also repeated as local style differences. Santa Catalina carvers have always regarded their bowls as some of their best art. On that island, however, there is not a carver of posts to be found, and elaborately carved posts are not an architectural feature of their sacred commemorative structures as they are on neighboring Santa Ana Island. The same is true for carved caskets in which the disinterred bones of illustrious men are encased, and which are a feature of Santa Ana funereal commemorations. These are not a part of the same rites as they are observed on



Serving vessels for commemorative feasts. Although they look very much like communion bowls in these pictures, the top vessel, carved by Rasia and Farunga of Santa Catalina Island, is over nine feet long; the bottom vessel, carved by Farunga of Santa Catalina Island, is about six feet long. These large containers are used to present and serve food at commemorative feasts.

Santa Catalina. On the other hand, very large (up to ten feet long) bowl-shaped vessels, from which servings of special food are made at certain feasts, are rarely carved on Santa Ana. They are a specialty of Santa Catalina carvers and are, in fact, the major sculpture of that island. Both Santa Ana and Santa Catalina peoples utilize the large vessels, but it is usually a Santa Catalina carver who receives the commission to carve a new one for celebrations on either island.

Who becomes a carver in the Eastern Solomons is determined mostly by interest and aptitude. There are neither hereditary positions for artists nor hereditary groups of artisans.

Anyone who has the interest and ability may become a sculptor. It helps, of course, if either one's father or maternal uncle is a skilled carver, for in that case the two senior men who are closest to a boy in this matrilineal society are immediately available to give guidance and instruction. But this family interest is not necessary, for it is possible to receive specialized instruction from any expert if it is desired. All men in this society are skilled woodworkers, and carvers are not necessarily better than ordinary craftsmen in the use of their tools. All men, too, are familiar with the traditional motifs and designs used in carving. High interest, then, is the first



One of the canoe houses at Natagera Village, Santa Ana Island. These structures serve not only as storage places for the sacred bonito canoes but as men's club houses, ritual centers for the worship of tutelary deities, and ossuary for the storage of encased bones of honored dead. The ossuary of this house is located in the center at the rear. The large post at the left carved by Sao inspired Reresimae to carve the post of Pa-na-waiuu in the University Museum collection (page 9 left).

prerequisite for becoming a carver.

Beyond this, the necessary talents are the same indefinable aesthetic characteristics that seem to distinguish the artist from the non-artist in our society. Whatever these characteristics are, they appear to be cognitive and in them seem to be located the factors that also produce individual variations among artists. Nowhere are these variations more noticeable than in the manner in which a carver approaches the problem of his sculpture. Farunga of Santa Catalina, who is regarded as one of the best carvers of large vessels, thinks out every detail of his design and tries to anticipate every technical problem of execution before his axe is even lifted to fell a tree for the material. With his design fixed in mind he works compulsively for long uninterrupted periods as if he were racing against time. Farunga will not tolerate anyone to help him or anyone but his wife to watch him while he carves.

Reresimae also conceives his design completely before he starts to carve, but he works at a more leisurely pace than Farunga, and he likes to have an assistant to keep him company and to do most of the rough carving after he has delineated the critical outlines of the constituent forms. He also lets the assistant do most of the final surface refinement with a small adze, pumice stone, and a scraper of broken glass. His assistant for the two posts he carved for the University Museum was Maemae, a man in his late fifties who was born on Ulawa Island and who is a carver of fine ritual bowls. Maemae was eager to work with Reresimae on these posts, for he had never worked on posts before and wanted to learn the technique which he considered to be more difficult.

Nimanima and Faruara work in another way. They start carving when they have only a rough idea of what they want to achieve. Details of form and composition are evolved as they carve. Both men work much more slowly than Farunga and Reresimae and both frequently become blocked by their inability to decide between alternative conceptions.

Karopungi's technique is in some ways an enigma. One of the characteristics of his personal style is the roughness and irregularities of the surfaces and edges of the integral forms. Indeed, on this account his work is often criticized for being careless and sloppy. But whether or not special surface treatment is done for a studied effect or is just poor technique I could not determine, for he refused to discuss it. Nevertheless, he works quickly and surely up to a point, then he is apt to lose interest for a time and turn to another

piece until the right mood strikes him to return to the piece he left.

Despite these idiosyncrasies, when the work of any one or all of these carvers is compared with the attempts of men who are not fully recognized carvers, the differences are immediately apparent. Occasions to make such comparisons arose several times, for many men who are not fully competent sculptors did try to produce work which they hoped would be purchased for the Museum collection. The difference was never in technique alone, but in the conception of the sculpture. By local standards their forms were not appropriate, their compositions were not balanced correctly, and their iconography was thought to be deviant or inappropriate. In one instance, a would-be carver, although a fine craftsman, was unable to make an acceptable reproduction of a very fine post that stands in one of the Santa Ana canoe houses, because he could not master the composition of the original.

It has been seventy-five years or more since blades of stone and shell have been used, but the tools that carvers use today are the simplest possible. Adzes, the blades for which are made from any kind of scrap iron, ground down to the correct shape on a volcanic stone, or from a steel plane blade, are the all-purpose tool. With a kit of adzes of several shapes and sizes a good craftsman can do most anything. Aside from the adze a nail or a bit of stiff wire serves as a drill point or punch; a salvaged screw-driver, usually obtained off the American military dumps over twenty years ago, or a flattened spike serves as a chisel or gouge. Few men even have a good pocket knife, and many have only a sharpened table knife or some kind of small iron blade for whittling. To smooth out the adze marks, surfaces are finished by scraping them with broken glass and rubbing them with pumice stone. Both float in from the sea; the glass as Japanese fishing-net floats, the pumice from an active volcano located 150 miles to the east. Paint is nearly always applied to sculpture. Black is achieved by mixing powdered charcoal with the sap of a certain tree and applying the mixture at least once, followed by one or more applications of the sap alone. The other traditional colors are white and terra cotta. The white is from lime obtained by burning coral, the terra cotta is from a red earth. The black is permanent, the white and terra cotta not.

On some of the Museum's carvings orange (red lead) and pale blue oil paints have been used in place of the lime white and earth terra cotta. This oil paint was salvaged from a ship that was wrecked on the reef of Santa Ana Island a few years back. There is no question that if

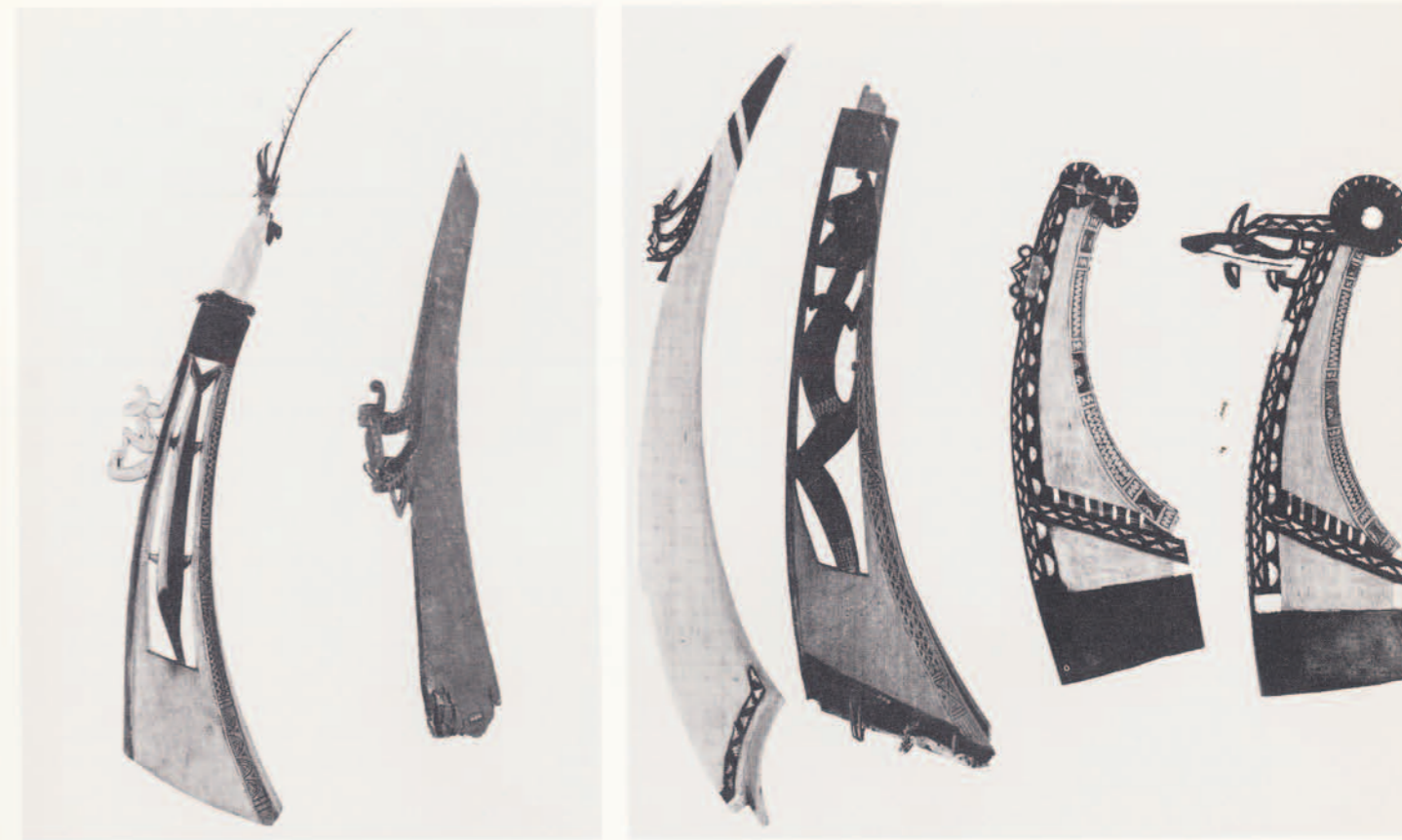


A sacred bonito canoe about to be launched, Santa Catalina Island. Bonito canoes are inlaid with shell and have carved stems, fore and aft; ordinary fishing canoes do not have such elaborate decoration. Santa Ana Island lies in the distance.

carvers could obtain oil paints easily, they would use them all the time and in as many colors as possible.

Shell inlay, which against black surfaces is almost the hallmark of sculpture from the British Solomons, comes from two kinds of shell. The small, angular mother-of-pearl is cut from the paper-thin shell of the nautilus which drift ashore.

The larger, round and half-round shell inlays come from a relatively large species of conus shell. The inlay disks must be ground out of the flat ends of the conus, but these are no longer made because of the enormous labor involved. Whereas the nautilus mother-of-pearl is relatively valueless, the conus disks are extremely valuable. Conus disks are always saved after the decorated



Stem pieces for bonito canoes. The anthropomorphic figures represent generalized deities. The double disc design (second from right) is a variation on the scroll motif. The head of a sea bird (far right) is also a scroll design modified by the addition of a beak and fish.

object has deteriorated and used again. All conus disks are now heirlooms.

To accommodate shell inlay the wood is cut out to only the approximate shape of and a bit larger than the inlay. The pocket is filled with a natural putty, obtained by scraping out the oily fruit pulp of a common tree, and the shell is pressed into the putty. The putty hardens with the texture of plastic wood. When it is smoothed and the entire surface of the sculpture is stained black the putty and wood are indistinguishable. For linear patterns of inlay a channel, rather than individual cuts, is made. After filling the channel with putty the shell bits are pressed in as close or as far apart as taste dictates.

One thing all carvers have in common is a distinctive mode of attack to a piece of sculpture. This approach, in fact, is used for all forms of woodworking, whether it be sculpture or making a canoe paddle. The first step is to remove all unwanted wood from around rough volumes, which are left in irregular cubic form. The second step is to reduce each of these cubes to the desired sculptural form. Thus, the first step is to rough out the relationships of the major sculptural elements, and in this most carvers draw

guidelines with charcoal and make sketches on the ground in order to see how the relationships will look.

In the Eastern Solomons there are alternative ways of presenting the basic sculptural forms. In one, all forms are basically rounded, ovate, or spherical. In another the forms are as angular or cube-like as possible. Still another is to mix these two in various ways so that some surfaces are curved and some flat with the two joined by an angular articulation. These two modes, spherical and cubist, are used interchangeably and selecting one or the other or mixing them is a matter of taste that determines personal style.

Since the rough volumes that are hewed out first are basically cubist, if the carver desires a cubist form the angularity of the rough form is more or less preserved as he refines the preliminary into the final shape. If the carver desires a spherical form he first makes a cube-like form of the scale ultimately desired, then he works the angles and the corners of the cubic form down into rounded surfaces. As one carver explained, "One can always convert an angular form into a rounded one, but the reverse is not possible."

Sculpture is clearly recognized as a special

talent, but it does not command the highest respect among all the woodworking skills. Greatest value is attached to the combined skills that are required to construct and finish the special canoes that are used for ritual fishing bonito and the large canoes used for inter-island travel and trade. These canoes are the most elegant products of this culture, and there is a high degree of sacredness attached to both types. They are not only exceedingly fine from a utilitarian point of view, they are also lavishly ornamented with carving, shell inlay, incised design, and painting. All the valued male skills must be combined for producing the finest of these canoes. While most men can construct a good utility canoe it is the rare man who can by himself construct and decorate a fine bonito canoe or a large trading canoe. Rarely, however, does one man try to make one of these by himself. Most often it is a group project in which gifted men in all the required skills combine their talents to produce the best craft they can. Despite the pooling of talent the construction is always placed under the direction of one gifted man who, if not in possession of all the actual skills, at least has an intimate understanding of all of them.

If a man can build a good house, construct a sound utility canoe, cut efficient and aesthetically pleasing canoe paddles, carve minor and major sculpture well, and also perform the tedious operation by means of which delicate geometric patterns are cut into all children's faces (see below) then he may be spoken of as a "talented man." To excel in one or two only of these masculine skills is not enough. The "talented man," or artist must be gifted in all. This requirement of mastery over a combination of skills is in keeping with the minimum specialization of labor in all sectors of Melanesian societies. Of a total population of about 1500 people in the Star Harbour—Santa Ana—Santa Catalina area not more than about ten persons could be rated as "talented men."

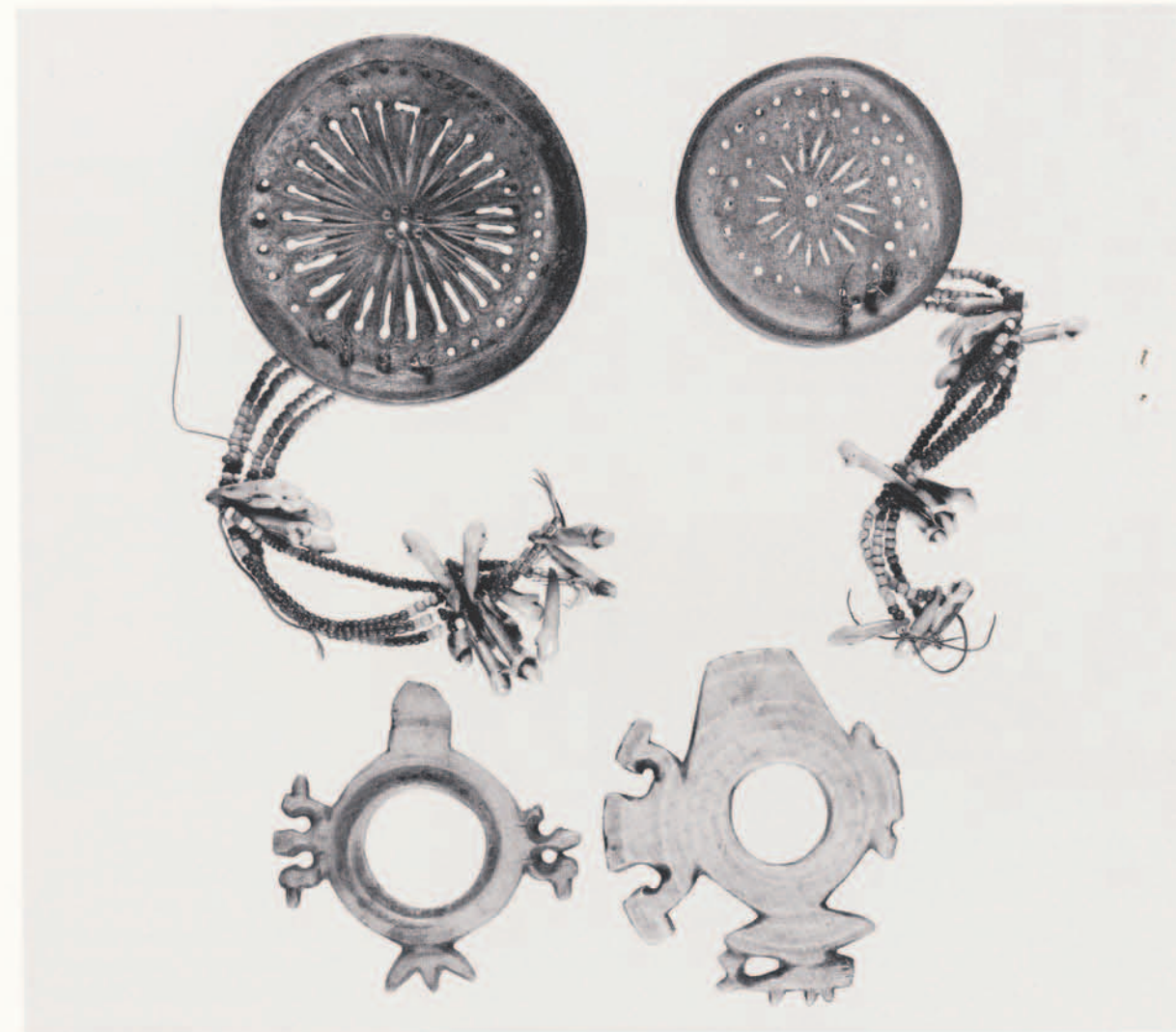
Excellence in several skills must also be achieved by a woman before she is rated a "talented woman." The feminine skills required are mastery of the forms of plaiting appropriate for fans, baskets, and fine mats, as well as the delicate art of tattooing. This complicated tattooing is applied to women only, but in recent years it has been abandoned.

Even though most carving is done on commission by an individual patron or a group of patrons and the carver must usually be paid for his work, the amount of remuneration is not great and men are therefore not drawn to sculpture for economic reasons. Men carve because they like

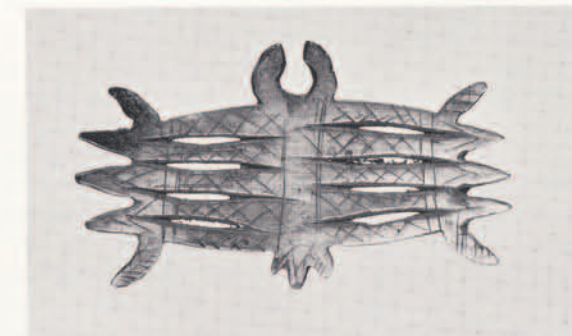
to and because they receive social recognition for their work. Usually, the patron organizes and purchases everything that the carver needs. He arranges for the tree, organizes the labor to fell it and carry the log to where the carver wants to work, and calls extra labor whenever the carver needs it. During the carving the patron feeds the carver and his helpers with special dishes. When the carving is finished there is usually some kind of celebration in the form of a feast, although this varies according to the use to which the carving will be put. In any case, the carver is paid something for his work over and above the food which he has received. Traditionally, this payment was in the form of shell beads, which are negotiable currencies in this area, but nowadays it may be in Australian cash. In the case of the ritual bowls, however, the patron can never pay the carver in currency, for the bowl is actually for the tutelary supernatural of the patron and for the carver to receive outright payment for something that is so intimately associated with a supernatural would be offensive to that deity.

Abilities in the plastic arts are clearly recognized as distinct from merely good craftsmanship, but no art object is produced for aesthetic considerations alone. All Eastern Solomons art is made with the intention of enhancing some object or activity which is imbued with high cultural value. In other words, the contexts for which art is deemed appropriate are limited, and they are mostly limited to those situations, objects, or activities which are very social and highly religious.

If we think of two independent dimensions in this culture, one extending from the personal to the social, the other extending from the secular to the supernatural, then we will find that the more social the context on the one hand or the more closely associated with the supernatural on the other hand, the more likely the plastic arts are to be deemed appropriate. Let us consider a few examples that illustrate this. Traditionally, the only art of a truly personal and secular sort is the tattooing of women. For cosmetic reasons only, most women were tattooed some, but few women were tattooed extensively. The extent was purely a matter of personal choice. Men's tattooing was never extensive nor considered to be a fine art. In contrast to tattooing all children of both sexes are subjected to the ordeal of having distinctive patterns deeply scratched into their faces so that every adult will carry what are considered to be pleasing facial scars. The significance of facial scarification, though, is not entirely cosmetic as is tattooing. The facial scars are visible marks of a particular social and cultural identity. No one but the peoples of this area have them. In sum-



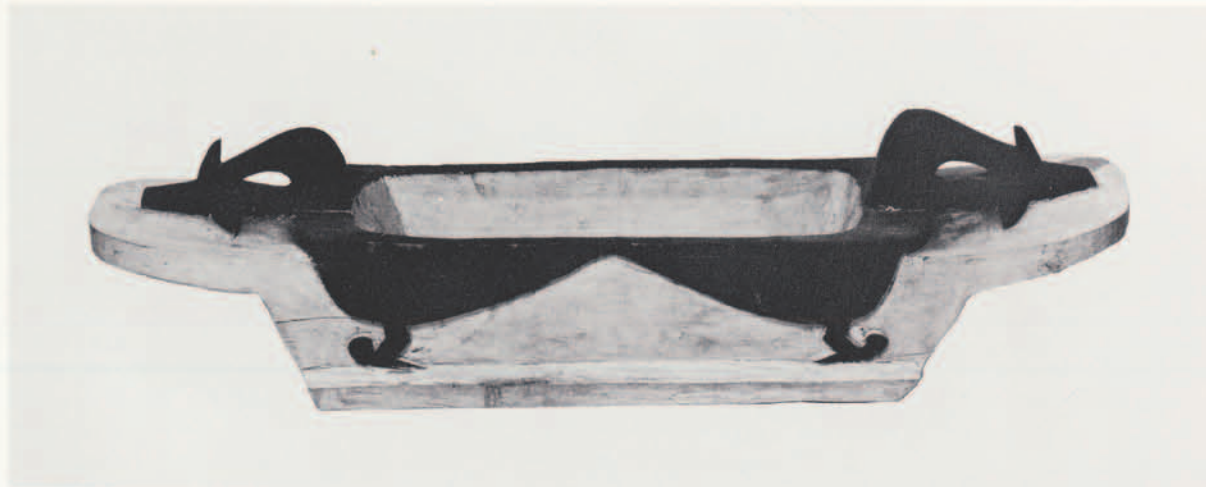
Personal ornaments of ground tridacna shell. (Top) Ear plugs with pendants of trade beads and bats' teeth, a form of currency. (Bottom) Nose pendants with bird head motif. Only men of great prestige would wear this sort of valuable heirloom jewelry.



Nose pendant of pearl shell. This motif is called "school of fish" and it is often etched or carved in low relief on the large trading canoes. Pearl shell ornaments are not as valuable as those of tridacna shell, and they may be worn by any man regardless of status.

mary, women's tattooing was a personal matter, and not universally applied even to all women; facial scarification is a social matter and is universal to all.

People wear virtually no personal ornaments except at large important social occasions. The most artistic of these ornaments are the men's nose pendants and ear ornaments which are ground out of shell. The higher the social status of the wearer, the more delicately carved are his ornaments. Women's ornaments for the same occasions consist mainly of arrays of shell currency worn on arms and legs, over the shoulders, and around the waist. The same relationships exist between social status of the women and the value represented in the ornament. Thus, personal ornaments were social expressions of rank.



A trough mortar about three feet long. This household utensil is used for mashing cooked staples and dried nuts or coconut cream together to make puddings.



Food bowl. Ordinary household eating bowls are devoid of decoration except for the lugs at the ends. The form of the lugs on this bowl is called "half betel nut." Secular eating bowls have either no foot or a small one; ritual communion bowls are set on pedestals.

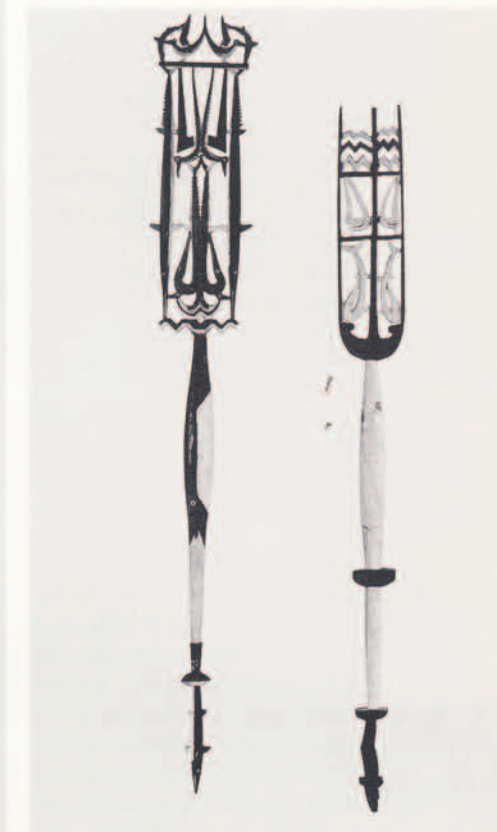


Household mortar. The low relief decoration is the frigate bird. This motif is often reduced to a W or M and even further abbreviated to a V, called "half frigate bird."

Houses and their furnishings are generally bare of any ornamentation. There is no interest at all in applying artistic talents to domestic activities and appliances. In contrast to this, objects that are used for secular public occasions when many households cooperate are often decorated or embellished in some way. Food bowls have attractively carved lugs on each end and there is a large number of abstract forms in which these lugs can be carved. The carving, however, serves as much as a means to identify one's own bowls from the dozens of others that are used at the same time as to serve personal aesthetic tastes. The large mortars in which staples and nuts are mashed together to make feast puddings and the presses in which large quantities of grated coconut-meat are squeezed in order to extract the oily milk for puddings, may be decorated. These objects are used mainly in connection with public feasts, not in the private routines of everyday living.



(Left) Two men's dance batons. (Center left) A shield. The shaft is used to parry javelins, the feather-shaped blade to protect the back of the head. (Center right) Canoe paddle of the type used with the great trading canoes. (Right) Two women's dance paddles. The shape of the men's dance batons is derived from the shields, of the women's dance paddles from the canoe paddles.



Turning to objects used in relations with the supernatural, only a few of these receive artistic attention when the relationship is solely between an individual and a deity. One such case, however, is the carved ritual pole used only on Santa Ana Island for private ceremonies with one's supernatural tutelary. Each man has one of these in his dwelling to which he directs his prayers and makes personal offerings. Such carved poles are not made elsewhere. Instead, a miniature ritual bowl is carved and this bowl is used in a private ceremonial by a person to honor his tutelary. When the same tutelary deity is invoked in public, the ritual object is very elaborately carved and inlaid with shell. These are the bowls for which the Eastern Solomon Islands are famous. They are used in periodic ritual meals, which each worshipper eats in communion with his deity and all worshippers have their communion together as a congregation.

All major works of art—the carved house posts, caskets, large vessels, and bonito canoes—are created as recognitions of relationship with the supernatural. One of these recognitions is the commemorative feast for a selected deceased

relative. From time to time a community decides to undertake one of these expensive and arduous commemorative efforts. During its course a vast amount of foodstuffs and other forms of valuables are distributed and consumed. In one of these rites several social divisions of one community select a few of their dead male relatives to be honored, and all the divisions coordinate their efforts so that combined commemorations become a joint celebration. Surrounding communities are invited to attend and are lavishly entertained. Each of these commemorative sequences has as one of its objectives the construction of some major works of art which after the celebrations are completed will stand as testimony that the rituals were successfully undertaken. These works can be the building of a house from which the feast distributions are made and in which all the posts are carved and other architectural features are similarly embellished. Or the commemorative works may be the construction of a number of the fine canoes that are used only for bonito fishing, or (on Santa Ana Island only) the carving of caskets in which the bones of the honored

dead are encased after they have been recovered from their graves. Regardless of which of these enterprises is selected, all of the participating groups will have commissioned a large food vessel from which its contributed food is distributed to its entire assemblage.

The focal place for most communal relations with a supernatural, such as the congregational communion meals with tutelary deities and the commemorative rites for the dead, is the canoe house, and each community has one or more of these structures. It is because these structures are the houses of public worship, so to speak, as well as being places where canoes are kept, that the best aesthetic skills are lavished upon them. On Santa Ana Island and elsewhere on San Cristobal (but not on Santa Catalina Island), king posts for the canoe houses are carved in complex compositions of figures that depict mythical, religious, and ritual events. On Santa Ana Island too, the caskets with the bones of the men honored by commemorative rites are also deposited in these houses. And it is here that the most valued and revered of all objects, the sacred canoes for bonito fishing, are kept. The canoe house is a structure in which the secular domain of man intersects the sacred domain of the deities.

The fish that they class as bonito also include some of our tuna, but all share the feature of often appearing in large schools. These schools are seen irregularly only during one season of the year when the bait they feed upon also school. Not only the bonito are attracted by the schools of bait, but so are large numbers of several species of fishing birds that feed on the same bait. Around the fringes of the schools lurk hundreds of sharks which feed upon the bonito. The combination of bait, bonito, birds, and sharks produces a phenomenon that the islanders regard as an awesome manifestation of their powerful tutelary deities. In their pagan religion the bonito are believed to be under the absolute control of some of these deities. Bonito, too, are considered to be the most delectable of all fish, and the appearance of a school is a valuable gift to humans. But schools of bonito are as unpredictable in their occurrence as they are nervous when a fishing canoe is in their midst. They appear without advance notice, they disperse suddenly without warning, and with them are always the most vicious of all sea creatures, sharks. The bonito school then has three salient characteristics: it contains one of the most valued of all seafoods in vast quantities, it is unpredictable and subject to quick change, it also attracts animals which can kill or maim humans. The three characteristics, generosity, fickleness, and



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Offering posts. Smaller than the carved posts for commemorative houses and canoe houses these images serve as altars to which prayers are spoken and first-fruit offerings of important crops can be made. (1) A representation of the deity Waiwori who appears to man as a dog or as a coconut crab. The crab is carved just



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below the dog. Sculptor: Faruara of Natagera Village, Santa Ana. (2) One of many deities that appear to humans as a shark and a sea bird. The bird is carved in the tail of the shark. The human figure represents the man from whom the deity was derived. Sculptor: Maemae of Natagera Village, Santa Ana.

danger seem to be just the features of temperament ascribed to the tutelary deities. The bonito schools reflect these, because they are a manifestation of the deities.

The appearance of schools of bonito have still another significance. If they appear regularly then relations between the deities who control them and mankind are amicable; if they do not appear regularly then relations between the society and its tutelary deities are strained. The bonito school is a kind of barometer that indicates the state of relationship between society and the supernatural.

With all these supernatural associations, it is not surprising that the fishing craft used to catch the bonito are regarded as sacred ritual objects and are suitably enhanced by the most valued skills the society possesses. Moreover, bonito fishing is of such singular importance that every boy must go through a long initiation which introduces him to the mystic milieu of the bonito. The initiation commences when a group of young boys meet the sacred canoes coming in from a successful catch. Each boy is taken into a canoe where he embraces one of the fish and comes ashore with that bonito as if he had caught it. The supernatural forces within the bonito are transferred to the boys by a ritual drinking of a few drops of bonito blood. Then for a period of from six months to two years the boys must live in the sacred canoe house isolated from women and the ordinary activities of community life. Their return to community life is marked by a large celebration in which the boys, decked in adult finery, are paraded up onto a platform where they are briefly shown off to the receiving villagers. The platform itself is a major artistic effort upon which many weeks of labor have been expended. Following their debut the initiates are ritually desacralized, a feast is given to celebrate their re-entry into the community, and they resume their lives in a spiritually transformed state. The social significance for the ritual seems to be to separate boys from their infantile dependence upon women and to prepare them for the one activity that best symbolizes the grown man in this society.

These conceptual and ritual relationships to the supernatural and the bonito as well as the initiation into them are depicted in Karopungi's *bas relief* panel. It was originally carved as a furnishing for a commemorative ceremony that was undertaken in the Star Harbour area about twenty-five years ago. The carver wanted to depict what he considered to be the most important aspects of community life.

Many constituent forms in the sculpture,



Low relief panel with polychrome shell inlay. This panel was carved by Karopungi of Star Harbour, San Cristobal to decorate a commemorative feast house. The scene represents a canoe in the midst of a school of bonito. Fishermen fore and aft have bonito on their lines, but the deities standing on them are not releasing the fish. Three species of birds following the school hover and dive overhead. The three fishermen with elaborate headpieces are initiates into the cult of ritual bonito fishing. Their head-dress is the kind worn only during this initiation.

birds, fish, sharks, sea birds, and deities portrayed as humans, are intended to illustrate these conceptions of tutelary deities in their relationships to bonito. Other animals that occur, dogs, land birds, crabs, and porpoise, convey the way other deities that are not associated with the bonito reveal themselves to humans. Thus, much of the iconography of religious sculpture is derived from the beliefs that supernatural beings have concrete forms into which they transform themselves so as to become visible to men.

There are also carvings that do not depict religious mysteries and whose subjects seem to be secular; yet, they too are religious. In these all the activities depicted are rituals, bonito initiations, commemorative rites, or legendary figures who were endowed with great supernatural power.

Even the cognitive processes of creativity of the artist are interpreted in a supernatural way. Ask an artist how he conceived of a particular sculpture, and he will answer that he dreamed of it. By this he means that the creative dream was caused not by his own conscious and unconscious mental equipment alone, but by stimulation from a deity. This, however, is not exactly the situation

in the case of the ritual communion bowls, for with them the tutelary deity communicates to his worshipper the kind of bowl he wishes, and these wishes are then conveyed to the carver who has been asked to carve the bowl. The carver must do his best to conform to the supernatural specifications of content. Sometimes a similar situation develops in the context of a commemorative feast. The soul of the deceased man who is to be remembered informs the organizer of the event what kind of large bowl he desires, and these wishes are conveyed to the commissioned carver.

In spite of the iconographic realism and the aesthetic literalism of Eastern Solomons sculpture there is still another, deeper, more abstract significance to their plastic arts. Most works are statements of faith in and adherence to the beliefs and social rituals in which the highest traditional cultural values are expressed. It is these traditional values which give motivation and direction to the entire society. The art is a testament of these values and motivations.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the traditional plastic arts of the Eastern Solomons are disappearing in direct response to in-

creasing contact with Europeans and their culture. This is happening in spite of the fact that Europeans are increasingly interested in the exotic arts of the South Seas. The University Museum's present exhibition is but one manifestation of the growth of this interest. But increasing involvement with European culture is causing a restructuring of traditional interests and values. To the present generation the preeminent problem of life is no longer the maintenance of an amicable relationship between man and his deities. The problem now is how man—the Solomon Islander—can maintain a rewarding relationship with the civilizations that surround him and make him feel more impotent and dependent than ever did his deities. His deities have been permanently eclipsed and with their disappearance the foundations of the art also vanish.

SUGGESTED READING:

- HUGO A. BERNATZIK, *Owa Raha*. Bernina-Verlag, Wien. 1936.
 CHARLES E. FOX, *The Threshold of the Pacific*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. 1925.
 WALTER G. IVENS, *Melanesians of the South-east Solomon Islands*. Kegan Paul, London. 1927.



WILLIAM DAVENPORT, Curator of the Oceania Section of the University Museum, has been working in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate since 1958. He made the collection of Eastern Solomons sculpture, currently on exhibition at the Museum, in the course of two field trips to Santa Ana and Santa Catalina Islands in the summer of 1964 and for thirteen months in 1965-1966. About one-half of the collection was obtained by commissioning carvers to make traditional objects, the other half consists of objects once in use but cast aside recently when one community became Christian. Some of the latter will eventually be returned to the Solomon Islands and placed in a museum that is abuilding there.