

## EXCEPTIONAL AFRICAN AND OCEANIC TRIBAL ART



### Auction To Be Held at Sotheby's New York November 18, 2000

New York, NY — Sotheby's November 18th auction of African and Oceanic Art offers 170 lots of tribal art forms, spanning diverse regions and cultures of Africa and the South Pacific Islands. Of special interest in this sale is the single-owner sale of the Egon Guenther Family Collection, a rich and diverse offering of art from across the African continent that is particularly strong in Southern and Central African pieces. This single owner collection includes rare works from South Africa, and is particularly strong in art from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

#### The Guenther Family Collection

Highlights include finely carved headrests, such as a superb Tsonga/Shangaan headrest, a 19th century example from the Northern Transvaal (est.\$8/12,000). While these headrests had the utilitarian purpose of supporting a sleeping person's elaborate coiffure, they were often passed down in families, and were thought to convey the spirits of the deceased ancestors who slept upon them. A superb Yombe figure, collected in the late 1930s or early 1940s, is estimated between \$60/90,000. This figure's stance and magical attachments identify it as nkisi, "a personalized force from the invisible land of the dead" which is used in lengthy and complex Yombe rituals.

Egon Guenther's lifelong attraction to the arts of Africa and Europe led him to open a gallery in his hometown of Mannheim, Germany in 1947. There he exhibited works by Abstract Expressionist artists alongside pieces from African cultures, inspiring an appreciation for the formal aesthetic interplay of these distinctive artistic traditions. In 1957, having moved his family to Johannesburg, he opened a second gallery, where showed African traditional sculpture, German Expressionists, and later introduced many of the contemporary South African masters to the market.

#### Offerings from Various Owners



The various owners auction focuses on an array of African and Oceanic works at all levels of the market from distinguished collections like the Faletti Family Collection, built over thirty years, and the Collection of Simon Escarré, which is extremely strong in the art of the Cote d'Ivoire. Among the highlights is a magnificent Kongo Oathtaking and Healing figure, estimated to bring between \$350/450,000. This superb and large-scale power figure

was collected at the turn of the 20th century by the German Explorer Robert Visser, who collected many of the most spectacular works from the Congo now in the Museum fur Volkerkunde, Berlin. From the distinguished French collector René Buthaud comes a superb and rare Southern Fang male reliquary guardian figure, estimated between \$250/350,000. Widely published and exhibited, this highly abstract figure is one of very few works that survive complete with the box, originally used to hold the skulls of ancestors. This hardwood byeri figure displays the definitive carving style of the southern Fang region. A rare and magnificent Dogon male figure (est. \$400/600,000) is one of three known full standing life-size Dogon works. A fine and rare Owo-Yoruba ivory armlet (est. \$60/90,000) is a highly complex ceremonial work that shows detailed Owo iconography. From the ancient Bangwa Kingdom Royalty comes a superb Eastern Bangwa hermaphrodite figure (est. \$70/100,000).



Several exceptional masks can be seen in the exhibition, including a superb Baule portrait mask, estimated between \$50/70,000. Thought to represent a person of high esteem in Baule culture, such as an accomplished dancer or person of great beauty, the highly ornamented mask has an elaborate hairstyle, downcast eyes, and a prominent forehead – all venerable traits that speak of intelligence, grace, and social prominence in the Baule culture. One of many fine works from Melanesia and the South Pacific is a fine Lower Sepik River mask (est. \$15/25,000) — a superb mid-19th century piece, carved with stone tool technology. It was collected by Colonel Ludwig Fabricus on the famous German expedition to map New Guinea and the islands of the South Pacific in 1911.

For more information, please contact Sotheby's Press Office (212) 606-7176