

The East-West Center Arts Program presents

# Altogether: CONTEMPORARY PAPUA NEW GUINEA ART

**Exhibition: June 29–September 5, 2008**  
East-West Center Gallery, Honolulu, Hawai'i

**Guest Curator: Jacquelyn Lewis-Harris, Ph.D.**

**Exhibition Design: Lynne Najita & Michael Schuster, Ph.D.**

**Featured Artists:** Timothy Akis, Jakupa Ako, W'keng Aseng, Wendi Choulai, Ruki Fame, Elisabet Kauage, Mathias Kauage, Gickmai Kundun, Watu Lopo, Benny Moore, Joe Nalo, Simon Novek, Larry Santana, Taba Silau, Albert Susuve, Waki Waikali, Jane Wena, Manfred W'keng, Cecil King Wungi

YOUNG WOMAN AT A MT. HAGEN SING-SING



MATHIAS KAUAGE "BIRD OF PARADISE WITH SNAKE" 1987

Located just north of Australia, the independent country of Papua New Guinea (PNG) occupies the eastern half of New Guinea, the second largest island in the world. This land mass with its multiple adjacent islands is home to over six million people. The country hosts the most linguistically diverse population in the world, with over 700 indigenous languages being spoken. PNG's geography features a wide variety of environments from vast river systems, swamps, grasslands, and mountainous areas, to volcanic islands and tropical rain forests, all of which contribute to the physical and cultural isolation of the people. This has resulted in a wide variety of art styles.

PNG gained its independence from Australia in 1975. This historic event also marked the explosion of the contemporary art movement, through which artists explored the visual interpretation of nationalism. Artists began to formulate a new national identity through their art, illustrating what it meant to be a

Papua New Guinean as opposed to a clan member. At this time in PNG history there was a concerted movement towards nationhood and anti-colonialism expressed in all forms of the arts. In this supportive political and intellectual climate, indigenous writers, sympathetic expatriate academics and leading Papua New Guineans encouraged the development of contemporary visual arts.

This exhibit is organized into three chronological sections: The Early Masters, The Centre for Creative Arts / National Art School Artists, and New Art Forms / New Artists. In addition, customary utilitarian and ceremonial art provides cultural context and illustrates the intangible spiritual link of the contemporary to the past.

## The Early Masters 1969-1974

Although the atmosphere and national spirit were sympathetic, the first artists needed guidance and a source of foreign art supplies to hone their skills and create



GICKMAI KUNDUN "HIGHLANDS MAN MERI" 1987

their initial works. Several people were instrumental in supporting and nurturing the fledgling contemporary art movement.

Three master artists, Timothy Akis, Jakupa Ako, and Mathias Kauage emerged at this time and had a profound effect upon Papua New Guinean contemporary art development. Like many of the first artists, all three were informally trained and had prior occupations as laborers or agriculturalists. They drew their inspiration from their indigenous cultures and showed younger artists that customary designs and subject matter could be incorporated into contemporary art forms.

Georgina Beier, an accomplished English artist and art promoter, mentored and sponsored Timothy Akis, Mathias Kauage, and Ruki Fame through the Centre for New Guinea Studies. In 1969 she organized Timothy Akis' first exhibit. This was effectively the first exhibition of contemporary Papua New Guinean art and the catalyst for the art career of Mathias Kauage.

Kauage was one of the best known contemporary PNG artists. He trained several clan and family members to draw and paint, forming a new school of contemporary art that focused upon social commentary and PNG modernities. The work of his wife, Elisabet Kauage, is featured in the "New Art Forms / New Artists" section of the exhibit.

Beier was also pivotal to Ruki Fame's career; introducing him to art welding and metal sculpting. His large public art pieces introduced contemporary art to the wider community and inspired Benny Moore and Gickmai Kundun to pursue sculpture at the National Art School.

Award winning artist, Jakupa Ako was mentored by Tom Craig, head of the Expressive Arts Department at the Goroka Teachers' College in the Eastern Highlands. On the other side of the island, Simon Novek worked with art advisor, Helen Dennett, to translate customary Kambot clan carving and painting designs into commercial paintings.

PNG contemporary art production in the 1970's and 80's was unprecedented. Both the Centre for New Guinea



WATU LOPO "UNTITLED" 1977

Cultures and the Centre for Creative Arts provided a nurturing atmosphere where emerging artists could work with artists and teachers from both PNG and abroad. These enterprises spawned a plethora of new art styles that advanced the contemporary art movement.

## Centre for Creative Arts / National Art School Artists 1972 to 1999

The Centre for Creative Arts in Port Moresby opened in 1972. The Centre offered associateships to selected artists, including those who were self-taught. These positions included free accommodation, studio space, materials and a small stipend. This unique situation continued until 1976, when the Centre became the National Art School (NAS). Manfred W'Keng, Cecil King Wungi, Wkeng Aseng, and the sculptors Gickmai Kundun and Benny Moore were some of the first students. The school

initially emphasized painting and drawing, but in the early 1970's they introduced a sculpture studio as well. Ruki Fame, with Benny Moore as his assistant, was the first PNG sculptor in residence. Gickmai Kundun joined them in 1977 and later became a faculty member at the NAS.

Kauage, Jakupa and Akis joined the younger artists and expatriate faculty to form an outstanding productive environment. Many of these artists went on to start their own businesses, direct cultural centers and become faculty at the NAS. Taba Silau, for example, became a well-known painter and director of the Madang Cultural Center. Watu Lopo used his painting skills to guide the development of the Enga Cultural Center and also contributed to the invention of the new painting form of sand painting. Joe Nalo, an internationally known painter, became a faculty member and is now the curator of contemporary art at the National Museum and Art Center.

There was a dearth of women attending the NAS and due to social pressure, very few graduated. In 1986, Wendi Choulai was the first woman to obtain a degree in her chosen field. Her work was highly personal and expressive, illustrating and glorifying her clan's culture while wryly illustrating and commenting upon the PNG urban environments. In 1996 she became the first female Papua New Guinean artist to exhibit in the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane, Australia.



WENDI CHOULAI PAINTING IN HER STUDIO



JANE WENA "HOUSE OF A THOUSAND TRIBES" 2001

## New Art Forms / New Artists 1990-2007

With the 1990 merger of the NAS into the University of Papua New Guinea, there was a marked decline of artistic productivity and the end of assistance for new artists without a formal educational background. The nurturing artist colony atmosphere has become a thing of the past. Artists still work together but they now have to promote themselves through new art forms and self-promotion.

Larry Santana is an example of a "new artist." He specifically pursued an art-related degree in graphics from Goroka Technical College. After working for a commercial firm, he formed his own business promoting his graphic and mural painting skills. His large realist paintings and drawings are beautifully rendered social commentaries derived from life experiences.

More women artists are starting to appear on the art scene. Even though the social restrictions have not relaxed, women artists are better educated and more prepared to enter the art market. Elisabet Kauage worked with her husband and occasionally sold a painting, but she did not fully enter the market until after his death. Jane Wena, on the other hand, is an

employed artist who fully participates in the promotion and sale of her art. She is a graphic designer for the Post Courier newspaper and an accomplished artist whose large scale paintings encompass the ideals of nationalism.

Waki Waikali and Albert Susuve have embraced new art forms based on customary designs and stories. Waikali's sand paintings use ground pigments found in the local environment rather than expensive imported paints, while Susuve uses acrylic paints to transform carving motifs into appealing contemporary paintings. Both artists are aware of the international art market and what art forms might appeal to it.

This collection presents a visual chronicle of contemporary art and social change during a pivotal time in PNG history. As seen in this exhibit, new forms are constantly emerging as new media, artists and the market converge.

**Jacquelyn Lewis-Harris** is the director of the Center of Human Origin and Cultural Diversity at the University of Missouri. Dr. Lewis-Harris received her Doctorate in cultural anthropology from Washington University in St. Louis. She has lived and traveled extensively in the Pacific, particularly in Papua New Guinea, and has worked in the visual arts as both an artist and a curator.



The **East-West Center** is an education and research organization established by the U.S. Congress in 1960 to strengthen relations and understanding among the peoples and nations of Asia, the Pacific, and the United States. The Center contributes to a peaceful, prosperous, and just Asia Pacific community by serving as a vigorous hub for cooperative research, education, and dialogue on critical issues of common concern to the Asia Pacific region and the United States. Funding for the Center comes from the U.S. government, with additional support provided by private agencies, individuals, foundations, corporations, and the governments of the region.

The **EWC Arts Program**, part of the Office of External Affairs, for 25 years has enriched the community through concerts, lectures, symposia, and exhibitions focusing on traditional arts of the region, and by arranged cultural and educational tours by artists who are skilled in bridging cultures.

**EWC Arts Team:** Karen Knudsen, director, External Affairs; William Feltz, coordinator; Michael Schuster, Ph.D., curator; Eric Chang, arts program assistant; Nathan Nass, student assistant; mahalo also to Derek Ferrar; Lynne Najita, Shayne Hasegawa, Ralph Carvalho, Loraine Ikeda, Carol Matsuda, Deanna O'Brian, Floren Elman-Singh, Lucy Kamealoha, Reynold Balintec, EWC Facilities Management, Leilani Ng, Color Prints, Carolyn Yacoe, Pamela Rosi Ph.D., Gunther Hintz M.D., Roger Rose Ph.D., Wright E. Harris III, Susan Chang, Nancy Hubirt; Kennedy & Preiss Design.

### East-West Center Gallery Honolulu, Hawai'i

John A. Burns Hall, 1601 East-West Road  
(corner Dole St. & East-West Rd.)  
Gallery hours: Weekdays: 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.  
Sundays: Noon-4:00 p.m.  
Closed Saturdays and holidays

For further information: 944-7584  
<http://arts.EastWestCenter.org>

**These EWC Arts Programs are supported by the Hawai'i Pacific Rim Society, Friends of Hawai'i Charities, the Cooke Foundation, Atherton Family Foundation, Jackie Chan Foundation USA, and generous contributors to the EWC Foundation, including members of the EWC Arts 'Ohana.**

**Gallery visitors interested in joining the Arts 'Ohana can obtain the appropriate flyer in the Gallery, telephone 944-7105, or go online: <http://arts.EastWestCenter.org>.**



JOE NALO "CUSCUS" 1987

### Special Events

All in the EWC Gallery, admission free

Sunday, June 29, 2:00-3:30 p.m.

**Opening festivities**, including reception and exhibition walk-through with guest curator Jacquelyn Lewis-Harris, Ph.D.

Sunday, July 13, 2:00-3:30 p.m.

#### The Drum and the Mask: Time of the Tembuan

Documentary film with introduction by the filmmaker Carolyn Yacoe

Sunday, August 24, 2:00-3:30 p.m.

#### "The Art of Early Times: Traditional Arts in PNG"

Illustrated talk by Jerome Feldman, Ph.D., Professor of Art History at HPU



TIMOTHY AKIS "BIRD ATTACK" 1977