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For Immediate Use
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“Fowler in Focus: Ceramics of Papua New Guinea”

Opens May 25 at the Fowler Museum at UCLA



The diverse peoples of Papua New Guinea maintain some of the most unusual and distinctive ceramic traditions found anywhere in the world. New Guinea ceramists gather clay in the hills or swamps surrounding their villages and form it into wares that range from superbly functional cooking and storage pots to highly esoteric sacred figures. In “Fowler in Focus: Ceramics of Papua New Guinea” —on view from May 25–September 28, 2008— visitors can see more than thirty fine examples from the Fowler collection, including bowls used for food preparation and serving, incised ceremonial vessels, figurative ceramics, and ornaments for the gables of houses.

In Papua New Guinea—a country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean comprising half of the island of New Guinea and numerous offshore islands—both men and women make ceramics, depending on the region, cultural group, and techniques involved. In many coastal communities women specialize in making thin-walled, round-bodied cooking pots, often beating the clay into shape over a stone. Where designs are painted on the objects after firing, this is done by men. No potter’s wheels or glazes are used. Quick low-temperature firing under piles of burning brush transforms the clay into porous earthenware.

“Fowler in Focus: Ceramics of Papua New Guinea” begins with a selection of beautiful sago porridge bowls made by the Sawos and Plains Boiken peoples of the Middle Sepik River. These coiled creations are dried to a leather-hard stage then incised with designs said to represent supernatural beings. Next visitors encounter decorated ceremonial bowls created by the Wosera Abelam peoples of the Maprik region, including a popular form that features a brightly painted face with a high relief nose.

This exhibition also features regionally traded works, like pot stands made in a figural style by Yaul potters, Iatmul gable ornaments, and works that incorporate human and animal figures. A final case features the distinctive and widely recognized work of the potters in Aibom,

an Iatmul village in the Middle Sepik. Several examples of their large hearths and sago storage jars appear here.

Today imported plastic or metal pans and buckets have replaced clay pots in many New Guinea communities, but some potters have thrived by adopting their products to meet the demands of tourist or export markets. The items in this exhibition came to Los Angeles from the 1960s to the 1980s, after collectors outside of New Guinea began to take notice of the islands unique ceramic arts.

"Fowler in Focus: Ceramics of Papua New Guinea" will be on view in the Fowler in Focus gallery, the central space within "Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives." Fowler in Focus is dedicated to rotating installations of new acquisitions, sub-collections, and particular artistic genres in the Fowler's permanent holdings. The Fowler is open Wednesdays through Sundays, from noon to 5 p.m.; and on Thursdays, from noon until 8 p.m. The museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. The Fowler Museum, part of UCLA's School of the Arts and Architecture, is located in the north part of the UCLA campus. Admission is free. Parking is available for a maximum of \$8 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call 310/825-4361 or visit fowler.ucla.edu.

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