

IKON

Exhibition Guide

1 May – 14 July 2013

Tapa: Barkcloth Paintings from the Pacific **First Floor Galleries**

This is the first major European gallery exhibition of tapa, the great painted barkcloths from the islands of the Pacific. For millenia, Pacific Islanders have made traditional cloth from the bark of trees. Often taking on ceremonial significance, its decoration is extraordinary, with patterns that are enjoyed for their abstraction as much as their symbolism. Curated by Nicholas Thomas, material for this exhibition is drawn from the world-class collection of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, dating from the nineteenth century until the present day.

Barkcloth is made by soaking and beating the inner bark of tropical trees, most commonly the Paper Mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*). Some barkcloths were everyday items of clothing or domestic decoration, whilst some were wealth objects, spectacular fabrics many metres in width and length which operated as vital valuables, presented by one clan to another on great ceremonial occasions. Others marked sacred spaces, or were incorporated into masks and other ritual assemblages. Cloth was often understood as a kind of tattooed skin, a powerful wrapping for the body which revealed its inner state and identity. It was primarily created by women using inherited clan designs.

This exhibition includes cloths spanning over 200 years, from Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands and elsewhere in the Pacific. The tradition remains alive in the Pacific and included here are two works from the small Ömie community who live in the mountains of Oro Province, Papua New Guinea. There, a remarkable group of women are adapting the ancient tradition to create work for the contemporary world, each with highly distinctive and personal styles.

A catalogue accompanies the exhibition priced £10, special exhibition price £8. It includes an essay by Professor Nicholas Thomas.

François Morellet **Second Floor Galleries**

This exhibition by acclaimed French artist François Morellet (b. 1926) comprises a selection of paintings made in 2006 which replicate works originally produced by him in 1952, magnified to a scale of 4:1. They exemplify the profound influence of tapa on Morellet's distinct style of abstraction, and visitors have an opportunity to compare them through the simultaneous presentation of *Tapa: Barkcloth paintings from the Pacific*, in our first floor galleries.

Born in Cholet, France, Morellet received no formal artistic training and taught himself to paint, his early works of the 1940s marked by semi-figurative painting and sculpture. Later, in the 1950s, he turned to abstract art, characterised by simple geometric forms encompassing drawing, painting, sculpture and light installation. Morellet used systems or rules to create compositions, as he explains, "my first love was focused on the art ... of the islands of Oceania and especially tapa from Fiji and the Solomon Islands, that contain

everything that I loved and I still love: precision, rigor, geometry ...”

In each of the enlarged versions of paintings made in 1952, the influence of tapa is clearly evident with repeating patterns of zigzags, triangles and parallel lines. These create optical effects that are enhanced by the choice of bold unmodulated colours. Morellet has a strong preference for repetitive and systematic compositions, devoid of any expressionism, but this is not to say they are without emotion or message. On the contrary, he sees them as being “rather joyful”.

On the question of the size of the original paintings, Morellet is incisive: “Why in 1952 did I not choose larger sizes? It is, of course that I and many European ‘post-war’ artists suffered from three crippling obstacles: lack of space, lack of encouragement and perhaps also the lack of courage.”

This exhibition is supported by Institut Français Royaume-Uni.

A catalogue accompanies the exhibition priced £10, special exhibition price £8 and featuring texts by Morellet himself.

Giorgio Sadotti ***THIS THIS MONSTER THIS THINGS*** **Tower Room**

Since 2010, British artist Giorgio Sadotti has been assembling *THIS THIS MONSTER THIS THINGS*, made from objects produced by fifty-one artist friends and acquaintances.

As Sadotti explains, “The lack of understanding and general knowledge as to how our human bodies work and where our various bits are located is astounding to me. Possibly one reason for this is that we tend to unimaginatively isolate and divide ourselves and our lives into specific bite size

chunks, losing sight of the interconnected issues and details. I tend to think that the detailing that flows between the list of body parts is the most vital yet more often overlooked. *THIS THIS MONSTER THIS THINGS* is a clumsy attempt to focus one’s attention on related ideas.”

Commissioned and produced by Focal Point Gallery, Southend-on-Sea.

The Tower Room is only accessible via a number of steps.

Visit the Resource Room where you can find a selection of books, audio and film.

If you have any questions about the exhibition please ask the Visitor Assistants in the gallery.

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Ikon Gallery
Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS
0121 248 0708
www.ikon-gallery.co.uk

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