

THE INDIGENOUS ARTS OF THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

The Spanish made their first landfall in 1521, and there followed over 350 years of control that dramatically altered Philippine social, religious, economic, and cultural development. In the coastal and lowland areas of the central and northern islands, local art forms gave way to a florescence of Christian religious art. Spanish influence on many aspects of Filipino life was far reaching and obvious throughout the islands. In the mountainous regions of northern Luzon, Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, and other isolated areas, existing cultures were less affected and the indigenous arts were made and maintained into the 20th century. In recent years, however, the arts that once flourished in these regions have suffered serious decline and, in many instances, disappeared altogether. Attempts have been made by various agencies and individuals to keep certain art forms alive, but these have met with limited success. As these traditional cultures gradually move toward the "modern" world, artists from these traditional cultures will find new markets and new directions for their work, both nationally and internationally.

SCULPTURE NORTH

At one time, figurative wood carving was much more prevalent than it is today, and in northern Luzon and other areas traditions have been lost or greatly diminished through acculturation. Early reports on mountain carving are scant, but it is evident that figurative carving was not always monopolized by the Ifugao, as it has been for the greater part of the 20th century. Evidence would suggest, however, that figurative wood carving was most prevalent in the Kankanay and Ifugao areas in the past, as is the case today. Figurative sculpture is primarily used for ritual purposes. Priests' boxes (punamhan) used by the Ifugao are often decorated with appendages at either end in the form of pigs' heads. Used by priests officiating at ceremonies, the lids of these boxes are normally plain, low-relief lizards or crocodiles sometimes occurring. In very rare instances, a three-dimensional figure may be carved as a part of the lid. Although this general type of priest's box is most often associated with rice and rice ritual, some boxes may also have had special functions associated with sorcery and disease. The most common sculptures from the mountains are full standing and seated male and female figures. These may be up to three feet in height, most being less than two. The best-known examples of wood sculpture found in the entire region are carved by the Ifugao. Called "Bulul," they represent a class of deities associated with the production of bountiful harvests, capable of miraculously increasing the rice both before and after it is stored in the granary. Although primarily associated with rice ritual, they are not confined to this function. Bulul is in fact a generic term for types of consecrated images. Figurative sculpture is also found in architectural contexts.

NORTHERN PHILIPPINE CARVINGS

(tall case near back exit door)

BACK CARRIER

split bamboo, split bamboo and wood, woven and
dried raffia

Hill Tribe, Northern Luzon, Philippines

Gift of Gay Ocampo Timon, 2003

MALE AND FEMALE RICE GRANARY

GUARDIANS (Bulul)

carved and stained Narra wood, female with inlaid shell
eyes

Hill Tribe, Northern Luzon, Philippines

Gift of Gay Ocampo Timon, 2003

LIDDED PRIEST'S BOX (Punamhan)

with bulul and stylized pigs' heads at each end
carved wood

Hill Tribes, Northern Luzon, Philippines

Gift of Mrs. Frances Damon Holt in memory of John
Dominis Holt, 2000

(9214.1)

STANDING MALE BULUL

carved wood, seeds, sacrificial patina

Ifugao, Northern Luzon, Philippines

Gift of George and Nancy Ellis, 2001 (11,806.1)

SEATED BULUL

carved Narra wood, sacrificial patina

Ifugao, Northern Luzon, Philippines

Gift of Mrs. W. Thomas Davis, 1989 (5876.1)

on right side wall panel

WALKING STAFF WITH EMBRACING COUPLE

carved wood, plaited fiber

Bontoc, Northern Luzon, collected circa 1905

Bequest of Evarts Ewing Jones, 1936 (4201)

WALKING STAFF WITH BRASS FIGURE

carved wood, plaited fiber, brass

Bontoc, Northern Luzon, collected circa 1905

Bequest of Evarts Ewing Jones, 1936 (4198)