

RA 250

1768-2018

Royal Academy of Arts

Oceania

Oceania

Main Galleries

29 September – 10 December 2018

Principal Partner



Supporting Partners



Supported by The Ruddock Foundation for the Arts

Oceania is the first ever major survey of Oceanic art to be held in the United Kingdom. This ambitious exhibition celebrates the art of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia, encompassing the vast Pacific region from New Guinea to Easter Island, Hawaii to New Zealand. *Oceania* brings together around 200 exceptional works from public collections worldwide, and spans over 500 years. It is a rare opportunity to be immersed in the art and culture of an area that represents nearly a third of the world's surface, a region rich in history, ritual and ceremony. The exhibition marks the 250th anniversary of the Royal Academy, founded in 1768, the same year Captain James Cook set sail on his first expedition to the Pacific on the *Endeavour*.

It has been nearly 40 years since the last major exhibition, held at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, presented an overview of the entire region of Oceania. Over this time, Oceanic art has been re-imagined by curators, art historians, anthropologists and artists creating new dialogues and deepening awareness both of past history and present-day issues. *Oceania* offers the chance to view its art and culture, including seminal works produced by contemporary artists exploring history, identity and climate change.

In 1768, Captain James Cook left Plymouth on what was the first of three voyages. Across the Pacific he encountered a world that was both highly sophisticated and, thanks to ocean-going canoes and navigational aids, interconnected despite the significant distances between islands. *Oceania* draws on rich and well-documented historic collections to explore this history and, in so doing, presents new contexts in which these objects can be better understood and appreciated.

With a focus on art made in the Oceanic region by Pacific Islanders, the exhibition is organised around three main themes: *Voyaging* looks at life on the water as revealed through the extraordinary stories of indigenous navigation and the arts of the canoe and canoe accoutrements such as carved prows and paddles. *Place-making* explores the settlement of communities and *Encounter* focuses on trade and exchange in Pacific cultures.

Highlights of the exhibition include the 14th century wooden *Kaitaia carving*, (Auckland War Memorial Museum, Auckland) which was excavated in 1920. This is one of the oldest known objects to have

been found in New Zealand.

Objects gifted or collected during the 18th century voyages include: two Māori *hoe*, canoe paddles, (Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge) collected on 12 October 1769, during the first voyage of Captain James Cook, just three days after the *Endeavour's* crew encountered Māori for the first time; drawings made on the first Cook voyage, by the Tahitian priest and expert navigator Tupaia (c.1725-1770) who, after joining the *Endeavour* in Tahiti, took to the unfamiliar medium of ink and paper to produce fascinating depictions of his culture including *Dancing girl and Chief mourner*, June-August 1769 (British Library, London); an 18th century *Heva tupapau*, known as '*the Costume of the Chief Mourner*', from Tahiti, Society Islands (Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter). This is one of only six known examples still in existence and was obtained in Tahiti in 1791 by Francis Godolphin Bond, first lieutenant on the *Providence*, the ship commanded by William Bligh; and a late 18th century *Feather god image (akua hulu manu)* from the Hawaiian Islands (British Museum), likely to have been collected on Cook's third voyage.

Further highlights include: a rare Fijian late 18th or early 19th century double headed whale ivory hook, (Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge) just one of three known representing these sacred and powerful doubled female deities; Tuai's *Drawing of Korokoro's moko* (face tattoo), 1818 (Auckland Libraries, Auckland). Tuai travelled to Britain in 1818 and this drawing, which represents the facial tattoo of his elder brother, Korokoro, was most likely made to illustrate Maori customs and culture; a 19th century Solomon Islands *Nguzunguzu*, a prow ornament for a war canoe (Museum der Kulturen, Basel) featuring a pigeon, an expression of navigational virtuosity; Tene Waitere's, *Ta Moko panel*, 1896-99, (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington) a sculptural illustration of male and female tattoos. Tene Waitere (1854-1931) was arguably the most important Maori sculptor of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; and an extraordinary 19th century *Ceremonial Feast Bowl* from the Solomon Islands (British Museum). Measuring nearly 7 metres in length, this bowl has never been exhibited before.

The exhibition is a revelation of modernity as well as tradition in Oceania including contemporary art that speaks of the salience of the past as well as the challenges of the present. Contemporary work in the exhibition includes the vast panoramic video *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, 2015-17, by the New Zealand multi-media artist, Lisa Reihana (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki) and John Pule's, *Kehe tau hauaga foou (To all new arrivals)*, 2007 (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki).

Oceania continues the RA's tradition of hosting outstanding exhibitions exploring world cultures, which have included *Africa: The Art of a Continent* (1995), *Aztecs* (2002), *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years* (2005), *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795* (2005) *Byzantium 330-1453* (2008) and *Bronze* (2012).

Organisation

Oceania has been organised by the Royal Academy of Arts, London and Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Paris, with the participation of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge.

The exhibition has been curated by Professor Nicholas Thomas FBA, Director of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and Fellow of Trinity College, University of Cambridge and Dr Peter

Brunt, Senior Lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington in conjunction with Dr Adrian Locke, Senior Curator, Royal Academy of Arts.

Accompanying Publication

Oceania is accompanied by a comprehensive book edited by Peter Brunt and Nicholas Thomas with contributions by Noelle Kahanu, Emmanuel Kasarhérou, Sean Mallon, Michael Mel and Dame Anne Salmond DBE.

Partner Statement

New Zealand

New Zealand is proud to partner with the Royal Academy and other Pacific Island countries to present this celebration of Māori and Pacific art. New Zealand's own future is inextricably linked to the prosperity and stability of the Pacific. Supporting this exhibition highlights our common threads of history and society and our many shared interests in the region.

The peoples of the Pacific are navigating challenges unprecedented in the thousands of years since they began to settle this vast ocean. A deeper international understanding of the Pacific – of its history and its future, including since European engagement began over 250 years ago – is vital to help meet those challenges. As the United Kingdom seeks to define its global role outside the European Union in the years ahead, *Oceania* will raise the profile of our region, with the opportunities it holds and the challenges it faces, to UK and international audiences.

Dates and Opening Hours

Open to public: Saturday 29 September – Monday 10 December 2018
10am – 6pm daily (last admission 5.30pm)

Late night opening: Fridays until 10pm (last admission 9.30pm)

Admission

£20.00 full price (£18 without Gift Aid donation); concessions available; children under 16 and Friends of the RA go free.

Free admission to the *Oceania* exhibition for all New Zealand and Pacific Island passport holders.

Tickets

Tickets for *Oceania* are available daily at the RA or online at www.royalacademy.org.uk. Group bookings: Groups of 10+ are asked to book in advance. Telephone 020 7300 8027 or email adultgroups@royalacademy.org.uk.

Images

Publicity images for *Oceania* can be obtained from Picselect, the Press Association's image service for press use. Please register at www.picselect.com and once registered go to the Royal Academy folder in the Arts section of Picselect.

Social Media

Join the discussion about the exhibition online at:
Facebook /royalacademy

Instagram @royalacademyarts

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#RAOceania

Exhibition Tour

Royal Academy of Arts, 29 September – 10 December 2018

Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, 12 March – 7 July 2019

About the Royal Academy of Arts

The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768. It has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

The Royal Academy has launched a new campus as part of the celebrations of its 250th anniversary year. Following a transformative redevelopment, designed by the internationally-acclaimed architect Sir David Chipperfield RA and supported by the National Lottery, the new Royal Academy of Arts reveals more of the elements that make the RA unique – sharing with the public historic treasures from its Collection, the work of its Royal Academicians and the Royal Academy Schools, and its role as a centre for learning and debate about art and architecture – alongside its world-class exhibitions programme. Royalacademy.org.uk

For public information, please print 020 7300 8090 or www.royalacademy.org.uk

Royal Academy of Arts, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BD

For further press information, please contact Johanna Bennett on 020 7300 5615 or press.office@royalacademy.org.uk

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