

# Peggy Guggenheim and the Pacific

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**Abstract** This paper examines the small Pacific collection of Peggy Guggenheim, looking at how it became part of a non-Western art collection that exists in addition to her important modernist assembled works. After highlighting Peggy Guggenheim's collecting practices, I will relate some of her display experiments. Finally, the discussion will explore the use and show of Guggenheim's non-Western art collection in a twenty-first century exhibition called *Migrating Objects. Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection*.

**Keywords** Peggy Guggenheim. Way-finding. New Guinea. Exhibition.

**Summary** 1 Way-Finders and Navigators. – 2 Collecting and Remembering. – 3 Playful Displays. – 4 Migrating Objects. – 5 Conclusion.



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To listen you must be silent.  
To enter otherness you must be respectful  
(Dening 2008, 154)

Examining where Pacific art could be found in Venice was part of the discussions leading up to the Venice in-person meeting entitled *Talanoa Forum: Swimming Against the Tide* (11-13 October 2022), held on the occasion of Yuki Kihara's presentation of *Paradise Camp*, curated by Natalie King at the Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion for the 59th Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition. For instance, it is known that the *Museo di Storia Naturale di Venezia Giancarlo Ligabue* (Natural History Museum of Venice Giancarlo Ligabue) holds an important collection assembled by Giancarlo Ligabue (1931-2015), an Italian paleontologist, scholar, politician and businessman. One of the star pieces, an Asmat soul canoe from New Guinea is displayed in the bottom loggia of the thirteenth-century *Palazzo Fontego dei Turchi* built for the Pesaro family. The soul canoe is one of the many exciting visual experiences for any *vaporetto* user on the Gran Canal. The Talanoa Forum was called such to foreground the Pacific concept of *talanoa* which Timote Vaoleti (2006, 21) describes as "a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations". It thus describes a process of dialogue that is inclusive and transparent. Less known to the general public is that not only the Natural History Museum, but also the Peggy Guggenheim Museum holds a Pacific collection, albeit small.<sup>1</sup> The organisers of the *Talanoa Forum* decided therefore to visit the Peggy Guggenheim Museum who had put on a display of the nine Pacific art works for the delegates to the Talanoa Forum.

This paper examines the small Pacific collection of Peggy Guggenheim, looking at how it became part of a non-Western art collection that exists in addition to her important modernist assembled works. After highlighting Peggy Guggenheim's collecting practices, I will relate some of her display experiments. Finally, the discussion will explore the use and show of Guggenheim's non-Western art collection in a 21st century exhibition called *Migrating Objects. Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection*.

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<sup>1</sup> Images of the non-Western collection can be seen online: <https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/art/works/?c%5B%5D=2823>.

## 1 Way-Finders and Navigators

The quote that introduces this article “To listen you must be silent. To enter otherness you must be respectful” are the closing words of an article by the Pacific historian Greg Dening exploring the concept of Pacific way-finding as a guiding principle when embarking on an intellectual journey (Dening 2008, 154). Way-finding is a interpretive craft used by modern Islanders to describe the skills needed to pilot voyaging canoes around the great Pacific Ocean. It is “closer to the signs the systems of the cosmos imprint on the environment” (Dening 2004, 167; 2008, 147).

Hence, focused silence is needed to interpret the signs that Guggenheim’s collection offers, and the application of respectfulness required to enter this different realm that is the world of Pacific art moving amongst modernist collections. These knowledge and skills stand opposed to that of the navigator who “has the security that the knowledge he applies to his voyaging has a life outside himself - in books, instruments and maps” (Dening 2008, 154). Similarly, I have no tangible knowledge about Peggy Guggenheim’s thinking when assembling her Pacific collection; the information is not to be found in books or articles, apart from the one article I wrote based on spending time with her collection in 2018 and 2019 in preparation to the exhibition *Migrating objects* (Veys 2020). I felt compelled then, and feel compelled now to apply the interpretative craft of wayfinding as:

For a way-finder, no knowledge, no image is stilled in either time or space. The temperature of the water, the movements of the winds, the habits of the birds are all in his head. And this knowledge comes to him, not through his own experience alone, but through the eyes of a long line of ancestral masters and apprentices. A way-finder finds his way with style. No voyage is the same. His way is always different but ruled by his confidence that he will find it. (Dening 2008, 147)

Wayfinding implies a reliance on what happened before while at the same time dealing with relevant contemporary issues; it involves negotiating and accepting the ever-changing nature of things. Looking at Guggenheim’s Pacific collection offers the opportunity to think about the many ways to view and experience things, material culture and works of art.<sup>2</sup> I believe that - as for the *Talanoa Forum* - centralising this Pacific concept of ‘way-finding’ and contrasting it with the Western concept of ‘navigation’ is helpful in untangling the enmeshment that comes from a Pacific collection that has moved to a context

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the difference between art and artefact see Veys 2020, 46.

of modernist art. This paper will therefore oscillate between ‘navigating’, relying on the scarce historical sources and ‘wayfinding’, the informed interpretations one might make.

## 2 Collecting and Remembering

I am starting with some of the navigational insights, knowledge that is well documented. The Peggy Guggenheim Museum located in the *Palazzo Venier dei Leoni* in Venice, houses an impressive collection of abstract, Surrealist, Cubist, and Abstract American Expressionist art assembled by Peggy Guggenheim (1898-1979), who was born into the wealthy American-Jewish Guggenheim family with large stakes in the mining industry. Peggy Guggenheim grew into a socialite and art collector as testifies her autobiography *Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict* (Guggenheim 2005). In 1939, feeling that the art of her time was underrepresented, Peggy Guggenheim embarked on a collecting journey acquiring directly from artists themselves and sometimes from reputable galleries in London, Paris and New York. Even though her initial interest was in Italian Renaissance painting from Venice, her collecting activities gave her the epithet of ‘Mistress of Modern art’ (Davidson 2004, 51). Few people realise that Guggenheim also engaged with non-Western art and material culture from the early 1940s onwards. Her interest was sparked by her then husband, the German Surrealist artist Max Ernst who focused on Oceania and the Indigenous Americas. They were married between 1941 and 1946 but had already separated in 1943. Like for many of Ernst’s fellow Surrealist artists, art from the Pacific was a major source of inspiration, adequately captured in the “Surrealist Map of the World”, published in 1929 in the Belgian journal *Variétés*. New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, and Rapa Nui appear enlarged as well as Russia, Alaska, Mexico, and Greenland (Kjellgren 2007, 18; Dixon 2007, 555). Indeed, Max Ernst was an avid collector of – and according to Guggenheim annoyingly attached to (Guggenheim 2005, 263) – sculptures from New Guinea and New Ireland, but – true to the Surrealist artistic movement – he also acquired Inuit masks and *katsina*<sup>3</sup> dolls from New Mexico (Kavky 2010).

When Peggy Guggenheim was first offered ethnographic items some time between 1941 and 1946, she initially felt she did not want to ‘succumb’, using her own words, to the tricks of Julius Carlebach (1909-64) – a major New York art dealer originating from Lübeck in

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**3** *Kachina* or *katsina* dolls – in Hopi spelling – are the carved representations of the *Katsinam*, the spirit messengers of the universe who come to the Hopi in the form of life-giving rain clouds (Pearlstone, Babcock 2001).

Germany, buying and selling Surrealist art and ethnographic objects – who would incite her to buy ethnographic art and would phone Max Ernst almost every day to invite him to come to his shop (Guggenheim 2005, 263). She finally made her first purchase of non-western objects in 1959, thus becoming a relative late comer in that area of collecting. Collectors including Albert Coombs Barnes (1872-1951), Helena Rubinstein (1872-1965) and Nelson A. Rockefeller (1908-79) had preceded Peggy Guggenheim in combining their modern art collecting with African, Oceanic and Indigenous American pieces. In her memoirs Guggenheim enthusiastically recalled her first acquisition from Julius Carlebach comprising “twelve fantastic artifacts, consisting of masks and sculptures from New Guinea, the Belgian Congo, the French Sudan, Peru, Brazil, Mexico, and New Ireland” (Guggenheim 2005, 363). Josefa Silberstein (1901-2000) – wife and business associate of Julius Carlebach, who together had fled their home in Berlin by the end of 1937 sailing from London to New York on the *Normandie*, to open their first American based art gallery in 104 East, 57th Street in New York – was particularly keen on African and Oceanic art (Borellini 2008, 31; Sawin 1995, 185; de Grunne 2011; Mühlenberend 2022, 183, 190).

Guggenheim’s first purchase included three Pacific items: two *malangan* objects from New Ireland, a mask (76.2553.PGC 232) and a sculpture (76.2553.PGC 233) and one Chambri flute stopper from the Sepik River area in New Guinea (76.2553.PGC 239). Later, in the 1960s she bought additional, mainly African, objects in Italy from Paolo Barozzi (1935-2018), a gallery owner with whom Guggenheim had developed a longstanding friendship, and from Franco Monti (b. 1931) an art dealer who had conducted extensive fieldwork in Africa (Borellini 2008, 37-9). Guggenheim implied that acquiring non-Western art was correcting her painful separation from Ernst who “removed his treasures one by one from the walls. Now they [the non-Western objects] all seemed to be returning” Guggenheim wrote in her autobiography (Guggenheim 2005, 363). Next to seeing the objects as “a therapeutic compensation for loss”, art historian Ellen McBreen (2020, 18, 32) argues that they can also be seen as “emblems for Guggenheim’s cosmopolitanism, and ultimately a vestige of a colonialist era”. Applying the wayfinding skills on the collecting activities of Peggy Guggenheim, one could say that she was collecting to remember, to keep the memory of her time spent with Max Ernst in New York between 1941 and 1943 alive. Nothing points to the fact that Guggenheim was aware of the intellectual worlds encapsulated in her new acquisitions. Hence, is it serendipity or is it her wayfinding capability of reading the signs that emanate from the strong presence of these *malangan* sculptures, that her first purchases are also intimately linked with memory? In this sense the collecting of Pacific objects is part of the construction of the self (Derlon, Jeudy-Ballini

2014, 96, 100). *Malangan* is a collective term referring to sculptures, dances, the mortuary ceremony and ceremonial exchange of people living in the northern part of New Ireland commemorating the community members who have passed away. *Malangan*-art was meant to be ephemeral. It was left to rot or was burned. From the 1840s onwards sculptures were also sold to European visitors. As the art had been removed from its context, either through destruction or through purchase, the physical designs for the art were not transmitted from one generation to the other. On the contrary, for each *malangan* ceremony, carvers recall from memory the shapes and forms appropriate for objects. Therefore, both the *malangan* mask and the sculpture are re-embodiments of memorised imagery (Küchler 1987, 238-40). The other Pacific Carlbach purchase, the Chambri flute stopper<sup>4</sup> was originally destined to be mounted at the end of a long bamboo flute. It would only have been played by initiated men during rituals in the village. The sound was considered the voice of the ancestors. Usually hidden or stored in the men's house, only initiated people could see the flutes and their flute stoppers, for only they understood the true meaning of these objects as the ancestors' vicinity. Guggenheim perhaps also felt that the object materialised the link between past and present, the link between the ancestors and the living.

Peggy Guggenheim collected the Asmat spirit canoe or *wuramon* (76.2553.PGC 236) most probably in the 1960s. The creative developments of Asmat art including the distortion of proportions – this *wuramon* is considerably smaller than many of the older ones that can reach up to 12.5 metres (Schneebaum 1990, 45) – and the more dynamic figurative carvings sparked the interest of western collectors and museums from the 1950s onwards. Even though Guggenheim had been living in Venice permanently by 1948, she had certainly been made aware of the exhibition in 1962 *The Art of the Asmat, New Guinea*, featuring objects collected by Michael C. Rockefeller, at the Museum of Primitive Art in 1962 (Rockefeller, Gerbrands 1962). The Museum of Primitive Art in New York had been founded in 1954 by Nelson A. Rockefeller in association with René d'Harnoncourt (1901-68). It opened to the public in 1957. In 1978 the collection from the Museum of Primitive Art in New York, which had closed its doors in 1975, was legally transferred to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Veys 2010, 268; Biro 2014). *Wuramon* were habitually made for a one-time use at the end of the *emak cem* or 'feast of the bone house', that simultaneously celebrated the spirits of the dead and served as an initiation ritual during which adolescent boys became men. The canoe-shape with its dangerous Z-shaped water spirit, menacing water

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<sup>4</sup> The flute stopper has a label at the back that could be from Carlbach's hand but equally from someone else's hand.

spirits (*ambirak*) or human-like spirits (*etsjo*), helped the souls transfer from the world of the living to the world of the dead and the adolescents from boys to men. In a sense, also this ethnographic work was connected to memory. While it has proven difficult to identify Guggenheim's motivations for collecting (Davidson 2004, 51), the acquisition of the soul canoe may have been inspired by this 1962 New York exhibition, but perhaps also by her instinct in sussing out, way-finding the deeper meanings of the works, in this case its connection memory.

### 3 Playful Displays

Peggy Guggenheim ultimately collected nine objects from the Pacific, the vast region that covers one third of the earth's surface. Remarkably, except for the Asmat soul canoe from the current Indonesian western half of New Guinea, formerly colonised by the Dutch, all of the works come from the part of New Guinea that was occupied by Germany. Annexed in 1884, German New Guinea encompassed the north-eastern corner of the island of New Guinea, as well as the Bismarck archipelago (New Britain and New Ireland) and the northern Solomon Islands (Buschmann 2018, 203).

Guggenheim appears in a number of black and white photographs and fewer color photographs taken in the 1960s. She poses with her works of art - both modernist and ethnographic - in the library, hallway, living room, and dining hall of the *Palazzo Venier dei Leoni*. Relying on navigational skills, these photographs testify to the fact that Guggenheim installed her Pacific acquisitions in ever-changing arrangements in her Venetian palazzo, alongside paintings of Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Max Ernst (1891-1976), Morris Hirshfield (1872-1946) and Paul Delvaux (1897-1994), sculptures such as an Alberto Giacometti (1901-66) bronze or a Alexander Calder (1898-1976) mobile, Venetian glass objects and antique and modern furniture (Armstrong, Vail 2020; Greene 2020a, 12). Her use of the collection - sometimes even embracing objects - with its ever-changing constellation, shows her intimate relationship with these works, as the anthropologist and collecting historian Alessia Borellini (2008, 29) argues. Parallels can be drawn with Ernst who was known to pose in Guggenheim's New York apartment with his *katsina* dolls as if they were his children (Dixon 2007, 276-7; Kavky 2010, 210-11). The anthropologists Brigitte Derlon and Monique Jeudy-Ballini describe the close relationships collectors develop with their acquisitions as a process of domestication, and sometimes even socialisation especially when personalities are conferred upon the objects (Derlon, Jeudy-Ballini 2014, 96).

Guggenheim indeed seemed to play with her collection, in the same way she manipulated her earrings and spectacles (Campione

2008a, 23). Some Pacific objects appear regularly in different settings and compositions, others do not seem to have played an active role in her living space. This is the case for the *miamba maira* (76.2553.PGC 234), a large sculpture originating from northeast New Guinea, characterised by openwork carving representing a stylised female being surrounded by birds. Other figures including both *malangan* carvings appear in both large exhibition room settings as in more intimate living spaces. Guggenheim seems to have favoured the *malangan* mask to play with hair styles and glasses, superimposing the plant fibres of the *malangan* mask's crest, her own slightly wavy hair and her dog's fluffy hair. In another setting the *malangan* mask is juxtaposed to a Congolese *Mukinka* mask from the Salampasu living in the Kasai region. Peggy Guggenheim is seen resting her hands on the large *D'mba* mask from the Baga people from Guinea. Again, she seems to allude to the similarities in hair styles between herself and the masks. In that same set up she is also seen with her hands spread out. The Sepik suspension hook, the Chambri flute stopper and a male figure with a projection on the chest (76.2553.PGC 238) usually appear in a Guggenheim's library setting where she is sitting in the sofa or actually posing with a large coffee table art book.

As explained earlier, the flute stopper signifies sacred exclusive knowledge which Peggy Guggenheim might have intuitively appropriated to display in her library. The suspension hook (76.2553.PGC 235) probably originates from the Iatmul people of the area of the Cambri Lake, the only remnant of what was once the interior sea of the Sepik River valley (Peltier, Schindlbeck, Kaufmann 2015b, 16). This suspension hook hung from the rafters of the house with a rope pulled through the lug at the top. Bags containing food were attached to the crescent shape, thus keeping the food away from rodents and other animals. Other valuable objects such as musical instruments could also be secured. The boldly carved male figure probably refers to an ancestor, but remarkably, does not show any traces of scarification. Sometimes, branches from the betel palm were attached by way of offering in order to attract the favours of the ancestor that is represented. Would Guggenheim have felt that the suspension hook belonged to the sphere of the family house as these types of objects were used in the houses of clan elders. However, the depiction of a specific ancestor, a sacred being, make these suspension hooks objects of transition between the secular family house and the sacred men's house (Peltier, Schindlbeck, Kaufmann 2015a, 143). Again, placing the piece in the context of a library, exemplifying the Western idea of access to often esoteric knowledge, might have been Guggenheim's way of practicing the craft of wayfinding. Similarly, one will probably never really understand all the layers of meaning connected to the *kadibon* or *kandimbog* male figure (76.2553.PGC 239) from



the Murik lagoon on the Sepik River. With its elongated projection emanating from the chest and tapering downward to the height of the knees, this figure most probably represents an ancestral being or spirit and was possibly only shown to young men during their process of initiation.

By constantly changing placement of artworks, Guggenheim stressed the polysemic character of her objects, but also the high mobility of things. She in this manner captured some of the essence of New Guinea art. She thus challenged the Western methodological logic that constantly searches for “the singular and true nature of things”, a quest for certainty summarised in the question “What is it?” (Peltier, Schindlbeck, Kaufmann 2015c). Guggenheim’s double-sided Sepik carving (76.2553.PGC 237) also exemplifies the movement of things. She often showed it in a living room setting together with the large *malangan* carvings (NBA00023). It is not known where exactly the figure was carved. It might have been in the village of Yamok, north of the Sepik River, where Sawos men carved larger-than-life figures. Those statues usually represented a male ancestor, who was presumably more mythological than real, and each had a name. These monumental sculptures once dominated the interior space of the men’s ceremonial house, where they were probably tied to the supporting architectural posts. As the posts supported the house, the founding ancestors and their descendant clan members supported the village (Peltier, Schindlbeck, Kaufmann 2015a, 202). However, the figure looks male when observed from one perspective, female from the other. Could the fusion of the feminine and masculine be testament to the reproductive forces of both sexes that together can have agency on the social worlds that surround them (Barlow 2015, 25)? Or is it rather, as the anthropologist Günther Giovanni (2008, 158-61) suggests, part of a rare type of giant suspension hook, moving between secular and sacred realms?<sup>5</sup>

For a number of years, Guggenheim and her acquaintances remained the only viewers to the various settings in which her Pacific collection performed. In 1966, however, twenty of her ethnographic art objects were presented to the larger public with also a catalogue of the Venetian collection (Calas, Calas 1966). The objects were displayed without vitrines and fitted to the wall or set on small shelving in several rooms of Peggy Guggenheim’s home.

The exhibition fitted the ‘modernist primitivism’ framework of the twentieth century. Around 1910, the so-called discovery of non-Western art by twentieth-century modernist artists was seen as central

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<sup>5</sup> As the figure is rather large (about 135 cm high), it is unlikely the figure was produced for tourists who would have had great difficulty in taking it home. Even though it seems uncertain, it is impossible to affirm whether this figure was aged by a local Sepik artist.



**Figure 1** Peggy Guggenheim in the living room of Palazzo Venier dei Leoni. Behind her, Edmondo Bacci, “Event #247” (1956, PGC), and artworks from her collection of Oceanian sculptures; on the table, Joseph Cornell, “Fortune Telling Parrot” (1937-38 ca., PGC). Venice, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Venice. Photo Archivio Cameraphoto Epoche, Gift, Cassa di Risparmio di Venezia, 2005, NBA00023

in the shaping of Western art. These artists, searching for a difficult visual language started collecting these mainly African and Oceanic objects and drew inspiration from them (Clifford 1988, 190). Modernist artists that acquired or used Pacific objects in their artwork include Pablo Picasso, Emil Nolde (1867-1956), Erich Heckel (1883-1970), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976), André Breton (1896-66), Wolfgang Paalen (1905-59), Max Ernst, Matta (Roberto Matta Echaurren, 1911-2002). Many of them believed they were also rescuing Pacific art from neglect (Cowling 1992, 181; Kjellgren 2007, 18). The concept of ‘primitivism’ regained attention in the 1980s focusing on the aesthetic comparisons between Western and non-Western art (Aagesen, von Bormann 2021, 23). The exhibition held in 1984 at the Museum of Modern Art (MO-MA) in New York entitled *‘Primitivism’ in 20th-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* probably epitomises this approach. Ethnographic art is hence often presented to a well-informed public as a way to better understand Western modernist art and European art history. The art historian Christine Gouzi (2020) argues that “the reality of European art never took stronger shape than through the prism of another art”. The position is defended that one cannot talk about Pablo Picasso’s iconic *Demoiselles d’Avignon* (1907) without mentioning the Fang masks or Vili statuette from Gabon of which some faces in the painting show formal resemblance. In addition, who

studies the art of Gauguin without referring to the Marquesan and Tahitian sculptures he included in many of his paintings? In the archival section of Yuki Kihara's *Paradise Camp*, she even demonstrated that Gauguin's inspiration went beyond today's French Polynesian islands to include Sāmoa. In his *Three Tahitians* (1899), Gauguin copied almost one on one the *Back View of a Sāmoan with a Pe'a* (tattoo) from a photograph made by Thomas Andrew in the 1980s.

#### 4 Migrating Objects

In February 2020 the Peggy Guggenheim Museum opened the exhibition *Migrating Objects. Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection*. It presented Guggenheim's African, Oceanic, and Indigenous Americas holdings. Instead of displaying the collection again within a 'modernist primitivism' perspective looking at the formal similarities between the non-western objects and the twentieth century art, this exhibition stressed the objects' trajectories. I was one of the curators who worked together with Christa Clarke, R. Tripp Evans, Ellen McBreen, under the general guidance of Vivien Greene. The exhibition privileged the artists' intended contexts recognising that individual artists created works for social, spiritual or political reasons that are radically different from museum display. In short, we tried to highlight the original context, something that Peggy Guggenheim in her displays had paid little or no attention to. Even in the purchasing of the Pacific collection, rarely was a people or even the person she bought it from mentioned. Mostly the names of the creators or artists are unknown. This obscuring of names has made the makers actively disappear in the mass of the artist that is devoid of any creativity but is on the contrary reproducing the canon of its predecessors. Often, the names have simply not been recorded out of disinterest in the individual skills of the artist. This was something that the Dutch anthropologist Adriaan Gerbrands argued against (1967). In the 1960s he researched the carvers of Asmat objects, stressing their individuality and artistry. All of a sudden names of carvers (*wowipits*) - who also made the soul canoe in the Peggy Guggenheim collection - such as Bapmes, Bifarji, Bishur, Initjajai, Itjembi, Matjemos, Ndojokor, and Tarras from the village of Amanamkai (southwest New Guinea) came to the fore. They left the realm of static anonymous artists who were believed to repeat movements to create designs that have been passed down by the generations that had preceded them.

By according the maker agency, even if unknown, the exhibition *Migrating Objects* aimed at avoiding the trope of which the display of non-Western objects are often accused, i.e. "Ethnographic exhibitions have often portrayed Indigenous People as distant in time and

place, as ‘over there’ and ‘back then’” (Schorch 2020, 43). Considering people whose art had previously not received any attention or whose presence had not been noticed is happening increasingly and consistently since the beginning of the 21st century, making this often-academic discourse available to a general audience. Think of the exhibitions focusing on the forgotten black presence including *Black is Beautiful: Rubens to Dumas* at the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam (2008), *Black Chronicles: Photographic Portraits 1862-1948* at the National Portrait Gallery in London (2016), and *Le modèle noir: de Géricault à Matisse* (The Black Model: From Géricault to Matisse) at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris (2019).

Displaying the non-Western collections in dialogue with Guggenheim’s modernist painting and sculpture was an exhibition technique based on the perceived formal and conceptual characteristics of the works. This pairing of modernist and non-Western art addressed the tradition many European and American artists engaged in and which I have just described above. By going beyond the simple pairing, but by addressing the sometimes difficult colonial histories, the exhibition *Migrating Objects* again fitted in the now established tradition of delving deeper into the narratives of this non-Western collection. The growing awareness of the necessity of addressing narratives that go beyond aesthetic appreciation was exemplified in an exhibition that was consecutively held at the National Gallery of Denmark in Copenhagen and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam *Kirchner and Nolde. Expressionism. Colonialism* (2020). It examined the colonial context that made the art of these *Die Brücke* artists, Kirchner and Nolde, possible, simultaneously underlining the flawed narratives imposed on moving objects during their histories of new owners. It is a way to outline their lives, from maker to market, to museum (Aagesen, von Bormann 2021).

This wayfinding journey finishes off by a quick tour through the exhibition focusing on the contexts the Pacific objects were presented in. Actually, the nine Pacific works featured in only two rooms. The first room starts discussing the mythologisation of the varied groups of peoples who settled amid the steep sandstone cliffs of Mali’s Bandiagara region several centuries ago that have come to be known as the Dogon. Their arts are among the most researched, collected and mythologised in all of Africa. The second room featured the first Pacific objects and was entitled *Sepik Carving and the Sculpture of Henry Moore*. It explained that the Sepik area is named after New Guinea’s longest river, which meanders 1,100 km from the central mountain ranges to the coastal area in the northeast of the island. Over the centuries the peoples from this area have been in contact with one another, exchanging ideas and objects, thus blurring the boundaries between them. The three carvings in this gallery by the Iatmul and the Chambri in the Middle Sepik and the Murik Lake people of the

Lower Sepik reflected only a tiny part of the area's diversity, where about ninety languages are spoken. The suspension hook represents a sacred ancestral being and was used to keep food away from rodents. The flute stopper was fixed to a long bamboo flute played during important rituals. The *kadibon* sculpture was likely revealed to young men during initiation ceremonies.

We explained in the exhibition that the Sepik lands, peoples, and art conjured a rich visual imaginary, fed by travel accounts, academic writings, and objects such as these which foreigners - from colonists and missionaries to civil servants and dealers - obtained for ethnographic and art collections. When, in the 1930s, Henry Moore began creating his representations of the human body in a Surrealist style in, he borrowed from the remarkable forms of Sepik works and other Oceanic sculpture he saw at the British Museum in London and in publications. He believed that one should just look at Pacific art and not try to understand the history of the makers, their religions or social customs. Henry Moore's response was thus typical of many artists who thought that not bothering to understand the original meaning of the the objects allowed for a deeper understanding of their visual complexities.

A more intimate room focused on the small South Americas collection with the Chimu feather poncho from Peru that Guggenheim had collected in 1959. The next rooms focused on a number of works from Africa, with its twenty pieces the largest non-western collection of Peggy Guggenheim. It included a headdress that has been attributed to the Adugbologe atelier, a family-based workshop of sculptors in the Yoruba city of Abeokuta, Nigeria; a Bamana Ci Wara headdress created to be worn in performances honouring Ci Wara, the half-human, half-animal divine being credited with introducing agricultural skills to Bamana communities in Mali; a number of Senufo objects that were plentiful on the market in the 1960s through a combination of circumstances, including discarded cultural traditions, economic opportunity, and outright theft. The art of initiation was represented by works originally created in male initiation ceremonies known as *mukanda* in the southwestern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Before entering the final room with mostly Pacific objects, the visitor could see a Nayarit terracotta pair from Mexico. The final room was entitled *Imagining the Pacific*. The concept developed there, was that Oceanic cultures fascinated the Surrealists who were drawn to their art with its dreamlike subjects and processes of transformation. Max Ernst, for example, used selected Oceanic and Native American themes in his work. In 1942, Ernst gave Guggenheim his painting, *The Antipope* (1941-42), as thanks for her years of support and help in escaping Europe during World War II. She called the painting *Mystic Marriage*, since it materialised their complicated relationship. She is likely evoked by the hybrid horse-headed warrior

in red. We then stressed that the Pacific works in this gallery manifested a different kind of social exchange. The *malangan* sculpture from Tabar Island was used during the commemoration of the dead. It depicts snakes, flying fish and birds overlapping each other, representing the essence of the deceased. The Sawos ancestor figure is also in flux. One side has male attributes, the other female. It also embraces the secular and sacred. Although meant to support the village spiritually, it would have been located in the men's ceremonial house, a space where boys are initiated, and the stories of the community are retold and safeguarded. Unlike *malangan* carvings, ancestor figures would be preserved for future generations. In pursuit of imagery untethered from reality, we explained in this exhibition that the Surrealists were profoundly influenced by these objects because of their movable. In the object label they wrote:

They [the Surrealist] believed that mechanized Western society had tragically distanced itself from the imaginative ethos present in Oceanic work. By the extractive mining of the cultures of the Pacific islands, the Surrealists sought to reconnect with longed for non-visible realms of experience.

## 5 Conclusion

Guggenheim was guided by instinct and resolve when assembling art of the avant-garde movements of the first half of the twentieth century (Davidson 2004, 51). The same can be said for her ethnographic collection in which she instinctively seems to have captured some of the essence of these carvings. The collection demonstrates entanglements of creative makers and collectors with memory and it presents to those who are wanting or allowed to look, the possibility to experience different parts of hidden and visible realms. Whether displayed in Peggy Guggenheim's private home for her own enjoyment, or that of her family and acquaintances, the Pacific collection is in fact polysemic. Each object can have multiple meanings depending on in which grouping it is placed (Hooper-Greenhill 2000, 77). Presenting the ethnographic collection in its own right, without needing to educate the public about its role within the meanderings of Western art history opens up possibilities of glimpsing into different worlds if only one can listen and be respectful. Through the perceived bedazzlement, the spectator oscillates between looking, seeing, and understanding the abundance of visual and hidden worlds. We are all left to seesaw between way-finding and navigating.

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