



DAYAK

HEADHUNTERS OF BORNEO

(WORKING TITLE)

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PROGETTI

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Museo
delle
Culture
Lugano

DAYAK

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ORGANIZED BY

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IN COLLABORATION WITH

MUSEC
Museo delle Culture, Lugano
Switzerland



INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

In 1509, the first European ships ventured into the remote seas southeast of India. Navigating the Strait of Malacca, they sailed into the 'South Seas.' Without knowing it, they had entered into the waters surrounding the world's largest archipelago – Indonesia – a constellation of over 17,000 islands scattered across the ocean, a true, continent on water. And there before them arose the immense, mysterious island of Borneo, the third largest island in the world and home to the fierce, independent, headhunter tribes of the Dayak, a term coined by Europeans for the indigenous ethnic groups that inhabited the island.

Under the cover of one of the world's oldest rainforests, along the rivers and on the hillsides of a biosphere of incredible diversity, the some 200 ethnic subgroups of the Dayak developed their own very diverse culture. Despite a plenitude of dialects, languages, laws and customs, these disparate tribes shared distinguishing characteristics - profound animist beliefs and headhunting tactics and rituals for which they gained worldwide infamy.

Their history is long and complex. Borneo was a natural, geographical confluence point along the sea routes between the Middle East, India and China. Intersections and interface with the regional powers and eventually, with more distant foreign powers, brought the Dayak out of seclusion and into the spotlight of attention in the 19th and 20th centuries.

This very unique exhibition of +80 original artifacts belonging to the Museum of Cultures of Lugano, Switzerland, enhanced by the visual aids and suggestive set design of Contemporanea Progetti of Florence, Italy explores this island, this habitat, these people and their truly singular culture.



ABOUT THE MUSEC MUSEUM OF CULTURES, LUGANO

MUSEC opened in 1989, due to the gift of Swiss-Italian artist and collector, Serge Brignoni, who donated his extensive ethnographic collection to the city of Lugano. The museum's suggestive location in Villa Malpensata, a beautiful villa built in the mid 1700s along the lakefront of Lugano, evokes the nature of this museum, conceived as an institution where cultures meet and dialogue together. Along with the Brignoni collection, the museum hosts an impressive number of other ethnographical collections. The museum engages in a broad spectrum of cultural events and supports an active roster of temporary exhibitions that feature themed selections from its superb collections, such as *Dayak, Art of the Headhunters of Borneo*, (September 2019 – June 2020)

ABOUT THE BRIGNONI COLLECTION

Born in Chiasso in 1903, Serge Brignoni was a sculptor, painter and an avid collector of ethnic art, particularly indigenous artworks and artifacts from India, Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Oceania.

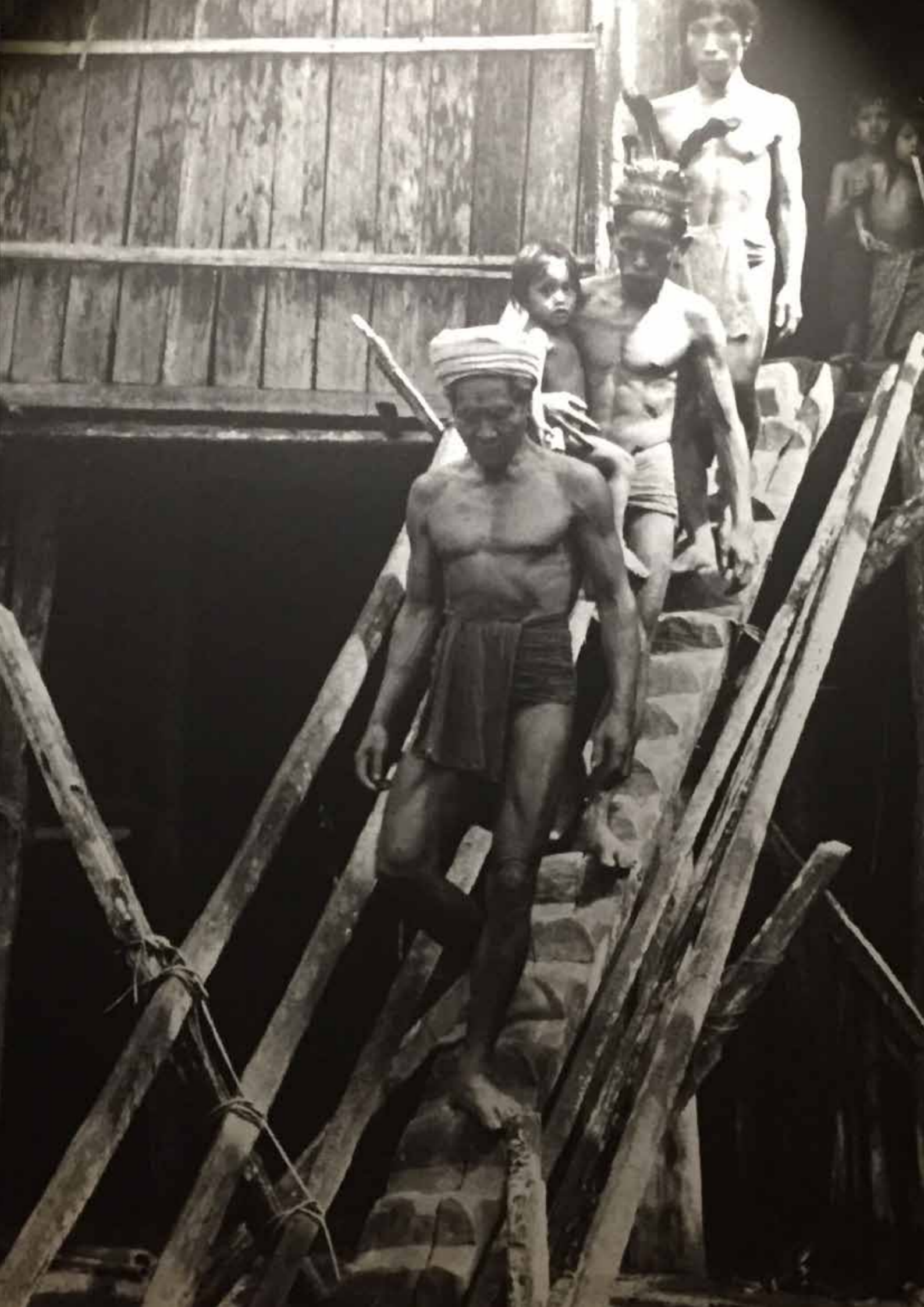
In 1919, he was enrolled at the Academy of Arts in Berlin, and then moved to Paris at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière where he experienced Cubist painting and came in touch with major representatives of the Avant-garde movement. Alberto Giacometti, Picasso and other surrealist artists exposed him to Primitive Art and to art *nègre*. Already passionate for this kind of art, in 1926, he began to collect ethnic art by wandering around Parisian flea markets and the small antique galleries that offered artworks from the French colonies in Africa.

In 1931, he participated as an artist at the Kunsthalle in Basel with artists like Arp, Schiess and Seligmann. There, he visited the Ethnological Museum where he discovered Oceanic art and decided to broaden his collection to include artworks from Oceania which, in the Surrealist vision, embodied the spiritual and spontaneous aspect of artistic creation and the expression of desires and dreams.

Moreover, in the 1920's, the growth of international trade brought many objects from remote and almost unknown areas like Indochina, Indonesia and Melanesia onto the antiques market. Brignoni gradually refined his interests and made excellent purchases from private collectors, galleries and museums in Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. In his collection, he started defining the idea of art of the "Mari del Sud" – "the South Seas" which included cultural artifacts from Borneo and other islands of Indonesia and Oceania.

In 1940, Brignoni returned to Switzerland because of the war, leaving many of his paintings and sculptures in Paris where they were destroyed or stolen. His ethnic art collection survived as it was stuck in a French customs warehouse where it was protected. He spent some time in Basel where he met Paul Wirz, who worked at the Museum der Kulturen and had travelled extensively through Papua New Guinea. In 1940 and 1941, Brignoni cooperated with the Bernisches Historisches Museum in Bern and struck up a lasting friendship (including the purchase and sale of ethnic artworks) with the museum director Ernst Rohner.

From 1946 onward, Brignoni dedicated himself tirelessly to the search for ethnic artworks and collections. In spite of his passion and his unique expertise in Oceanic art, Brignoni never visited these remote islands. In 1985, he donated his collection to the City of Lugano. He died in Bern in 2002, at the age of 99.



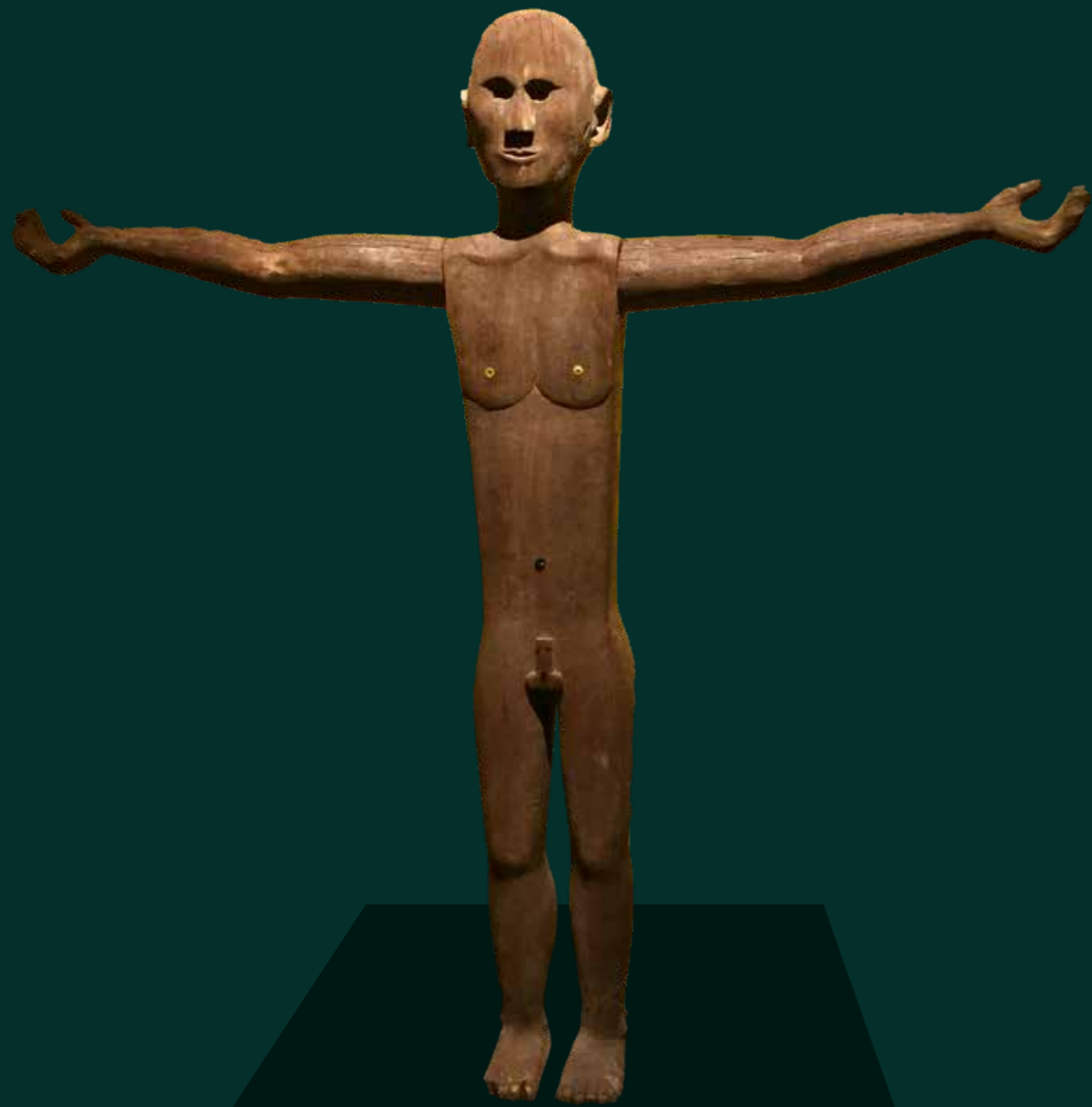
GATEWAY TO BORNEO AND THE DAYAK

In an ambience and under a canopy reminiscent of the Borneo rainforest, the visitor is greeted by a forest of large, evocative, sculptured figures in wood – ceremonial poles carved to represent ancestors, priests, divinities and spirits of the Dayak people. This is the gateway into this rich culture and equally rich biosphere, a strange, new world for most of the western world. Through original objects and other visual aids, the visitor is introduced to both the diversity of the natural habitat and the Dayak culture.

Themes:

- Crossroads and Confluence of Civilizations: an Historical Review
- Tribal Overview and Distribution
- The Natural Environment: Flora, Fauna & Endangered Species
- Cultural Spotlight: Sculpture Tradition of Borneo





Pantak
Sculpture depicting an ancestor
Wood
128 x 125 x 18 cm
Ethnic Group: "Land Dayak"



Group of sculptures depicting various spirits
Wood
Ethnic Group: Various



Sculpture depicting back to back female and male figures (detail)
Wood
93 x 21 x 21 cm
Ethnic Group: Dayak



Patungkng
Sculpture depicting a deity crouching on a gong, emerging from a lotus flower
Wood
92 x 33 x 34
Ethnic Group: Bentian or Tunjung



Sculpture depicting a crouching ancestor
Wood
90 x 17 x 19 cm
Ethnic Group: Benuaq (?)



Commemorative sculpture depicting a chief
Wood
117 x 30 x 28 cm
Ethnic Group: Kayan or Bahau



Bahutai
Sculpture depicting a powerful territorial spirit with hybrid anthropo-zoomorphic traits
Wood
134 x 38 x 38 cm
Ethnic Group: Ngaju



THE SPIRIT WORLD

Like many tribal peoples, the Dayak were animists and believed that many spiritual beings existed in the both the supernatural and natural world and were capable of helping or harming human affairs. Spiritual beings were all around – in the trees, the rivers, the rocks and the waterfalls. Carvings, totems, tattoos and other objects (including headhunted skulls) were used to keep bad spirits at bay, attract good, protective spirits and placate spirits that may be upset. Rituals and ceremonies were an integral part of village life – childbirth, marriage, the hunt, the harvest and death – were all events celebrated or mourned collectively. A rich array of objects attest to the animist beliefs and practices of the Dayak.

Themes:

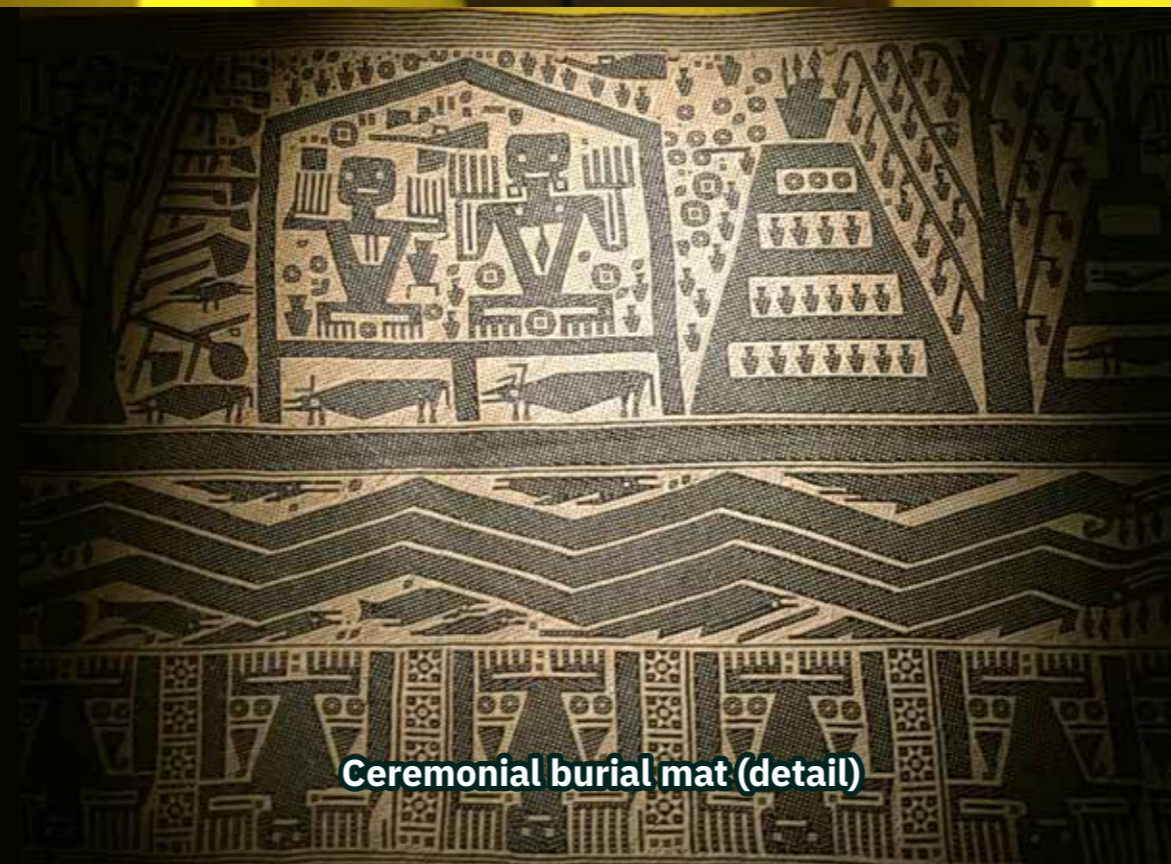
- Animist Religious Concepts
- Ritual & Ceremonies
- Funerary Belief & Custom: Ancestor Worship
- Cultural Spotlight: The Dragon-Dog



Ceremonial vests



Coffin fragment, Spirit of lightning



Ceremonial burial mat (detail)



Ceremonial jars



Hudoq
 Ceremonial mask used in dances to bless and protect rice plants to insure a good harvest
 Wood, pigment, metal, plant fibers, feathers
 90 x 50 x 41 cm
 Ethnic Group: Bahau Saa'

Hudoq
 Ceremonial mask used in dances to bless and protect rice plants to insure a good harvest
 Wood, pigment, metal, plant fibers, feathers
 75 x 54 x 17 cm
 Ethnic Group: Modang Wehea

Sapuyung daré
 Ceremonial Hat
 Bamboo, rattan, pigment,
 hair, buttons
 17 x 52 cm
 Ethnic Group: Ngaju



Exhibition View
 Musec, Lugano, Switzerland 2019/2020



Katambong
Ceremonial drum incised with three spirit faces
Wood, leather, plant fibers
61 x 19,5 x 19,5 cm
Ethnic Group: Ngaju



Katambong
Ceremonial drum decorated with floral motifs
Wood, leather, plant fibers, pigment
86 x 14 x 15 cm
Ethnic Group: Ngaju



Amak daré
Ceremonial mat used to depose the deceased before burial
Rattan, plant pigments
84,5 x 190 x 0,3 cm
Ethnic Group: Ngaju



HEART OF DARKNESS, THE HEADHUNTER CULTURE

In this darkened heart of the exhibition, the practice, origins and significance of headhunting to the Dayak people is explored and illuminated.

By the mid-1800s and the age of European colonialism, the image of the pristine, primordial forest of Borneo, rich in exploitable resources, greatly contrasted with the contrived image of the primitive, savage headhunters who inhabited the island. This dichotomy would shape the history of the island, the Dayak people and bring about the end of headhunting practices, by about the 1920s.

Although abhorrent to Western sensibilities, among the tribes of the Dayak, headhunting was primarily a ritual activity rather than an act or result of war. Its ancient origins are thought to stem from the belief that, according to rules proscribed by a spirit, headhunting acted as a catalyst for the cessation of personal and collective mourning of the village dead. Ideas of manhood, the endowment of supernatural strength, social status, marriage dowries, soil fertility and village protection were encompassed in the practice, and the taken heads were highly prized.

Themes:

- The Dayak Warrior: Arms, Enemies & the Hunt
- Truths about Headhunting Practices: Origins & Social Significance
- Construction of an Image: Infamy Abroad
- Cultural Spotlight: Warrior Crafts, Decorative Shields

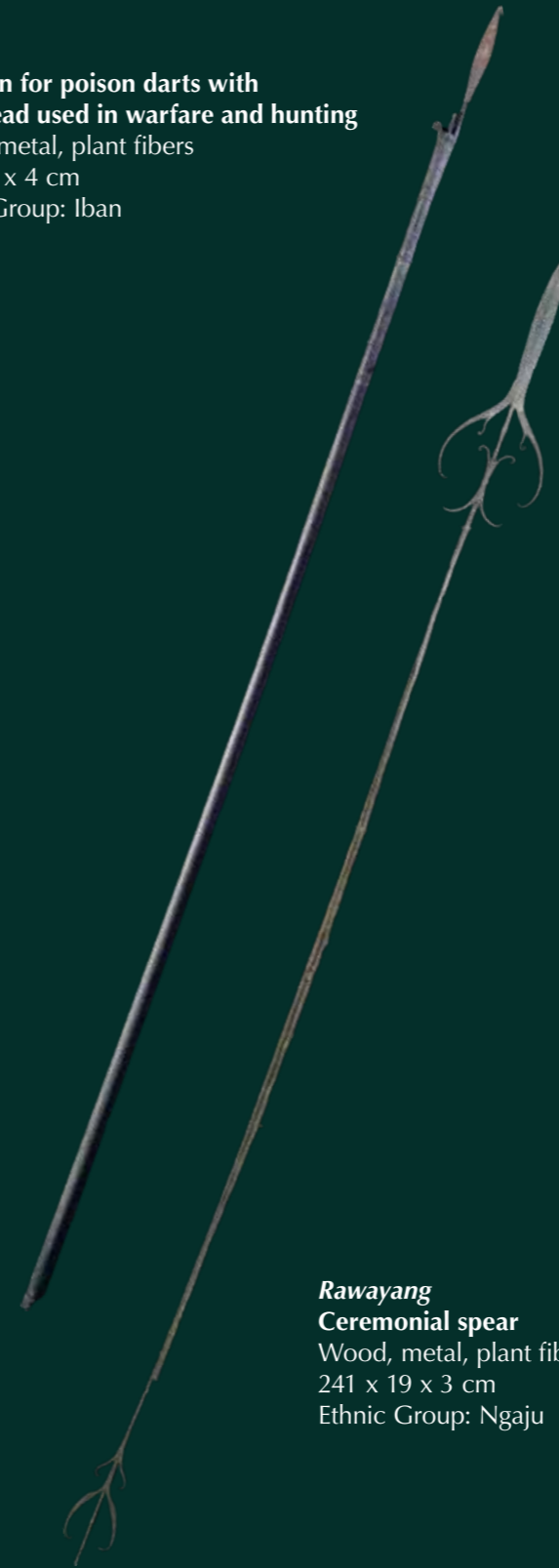


Exhibition Views
Musec, Lugano, Switzerland 2019/2020



Kelebit
Painted shield, front and back, decorated with human hair and with motif of the protectress deity of the underworld
?, human hair
125 x 43 x 9 cm
Ethnic Group: Kayan or Bahau

Sumpit
Blowgun for poison darts with spearhead used in warfare and hunting
Wood, metal, plant fibers
255 x 7 x 4 cm
Ethnic Group: Iban



Rawayang
Ceremonial spear
Wood, metal, plant fibers
241 x 19 x 3 cm
Ethnic Group: Ngaju



Tuntun
Club "magic" used in the hunt for wild pigs and deer; one extremity carved with stylized figure of crouching deity
Wood
53,6 x 4,5 c 2,7 cm
Ethnic Group: Iban



THE LONGHOUSE & DAYAK TRIBAL LIFE

Positioned in a suggestive set design, original architectural elements illustrate the unique characteristics of the Dayak longhouse. These large, imposing structures contained quarters for many separate families, accessed from a common, covered verandah that was the focal point of tribal life. Here were the communal spaces used to socialize, conduct clan affairs, cook and eat meals and hold communal celebrations. It was also the place where, come nightfall, groups would traditionally gather to tell stories.

Although longhouses could take a variety of shapes and styles, all were raised above the damp ground on hardwood stilts and most were built on or near riverbanks. For reasons of geography, traditional Dayak communities did not develop a hierarchy beyond that of the longhouse. A Dayak longhouse was not just the focal point of a village: it was the village. Each person's primary allegiance was always to their longhouse.

Themes:

- Concept of the Longhouse: Construction & Purpose
- Communal Life
- Prestige & Dignity - The Material culture
- Cultural Spotlight: Body Art - Tattoo

Longhouse
pole-ladders



Baby
carriers



Architectural
elements



Mausoleum



Work tables for weaving



Baskets



Door, clan house, depicting two 'dragon-dogs.'
Wood, pigment
190 x 88,5 x 9 cm
Ethnic Group: Bahau Saa'



Door section, chief's house, decorated in relief with depiction of anthropomorphic divinity, concentric hands and feet in form of 'dragon-dog.'
Wood
187 x 76 x 4,5 cm
Ethnic Group: Kenyah



Naga
Coffin decoration depicting a dragon
Wood
58 x 30 x 8 cm
Ethnic Group: Benuaq



Baby carrier, finely carved in relief, adorned with amulets, depicting protective divinity, prerogative local nobility
Wood
36 x 35 x 13,5 cm
Ethnic Group: Kenyah



Harimaung
Summit of ceremonial pole depicting an ancestor hybrid with a feline
Wood
164 x 32 x 62 cm
Ethnic Group: Ngaju or Ot Danum



Sapundu
Summit of ceremonial pole depicting a couple
Wood
141 x 40 x 35
Ethnic Group: Ngaju



THE DAYAK TODAY

Out of the past and into the 21st century, the exhibition concludes with an photographic overview of the Dayak people today and their assimilation into the societies of the three nations that today share the territory of the island of Borneo: the Nation of Brunei, East Malaysia and Indonesia.





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