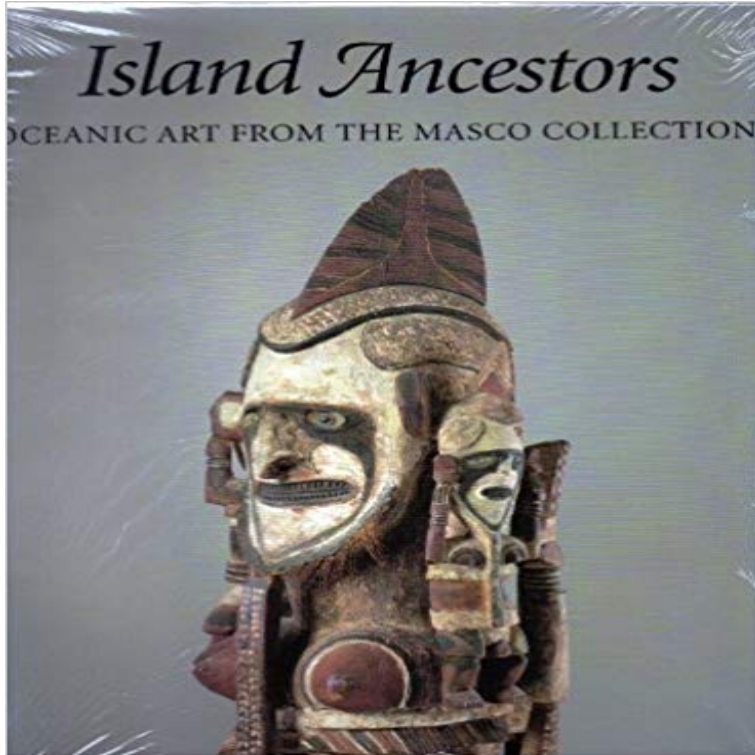


Island Ancestors: Oceanic Art from the Masco Collection



The Pacific Ocean covers one-third of our planet. More than twice the size of the Atlantic, it washes the shores of five continents and thousands of islands that lie within its boundaries. One group of Pacific islands, popularly known as Oceania, is the major subject of this book. The objects illustrated here come from the three Oceanic culture areas of Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia, as well as the continent of Australia. In the first survey of Oceanic art to be published in English in two decades, Allen Wardwell reviews the histories of the island groups, their settlement following migrations from Asia, their societies, and the philosophies and aesthetics that give context to the artistic styles and techniques that identify each culture. Although the presence of the sea brings some commonalities to the island cultures, the vast expanses of water separating them and centuries of isolation have led to great diversity. Most of the art of Oceania is religious in nature, made in response to the belief that the universe is governed by invisible forces that can determine and influence the events of life. Wardwell discusses the mystical relationship between the island peoples and the elements of their environment. Melanesia, for example, offers swampy, flood-prone river lowlands with faunas that include malarial mosquitoes and crocodiles; thick interior rain forests; cool, mountainous highlands; and areas of intense vulcanism - all of which contribute to a belief in the unpredictability and pervasive power of nature. Artists rely on a large variety of materials from their immediate environment to make sculptures, architectural decorations, masks, costumes, implements, and drums and other musical instruments for the rituals and ceremonies of their particular belief system. *Island Ancestors* includes 144 color illustrations of the most stunning objects from the Masco Oceanic

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