

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Moving Objects: African and Oceanic Art from the Collection of the Fitchburg Art Museum



Baining artist, Gazelle Peninsula, East New Britain, Papua New Guinea (Oceania), **Night mask (kavat)**, mid-twentieth century (c. 1965-1969), wickerwork, bark cloth (tapa), pigment, Courtesy of the Helen Slosberg Collection of Oceanic Art in memory of her brother Israel Sagoff, Gift of the Worcester Art Museum, Photograph by Charles Sternaimolo

Opening, October 27, 2018

The Fitchburg Art Museum (FAM) is proud to have important and growing collections of works of art from Africa and the South Pacific. But none of these beautiful and fascinating objects were originally created to be shown in museums! They served very specific religious, ritual, political, decorative, and practical purposes in many different cultures. And they all came to FAM through different—and often circuitous—journeys.

FAM's new exhibition **Moving Objects** presents over fifty artworks from Africa, Australia, New Guinea, and the Pacific Islands, and tells the story of why each object was made, and how it came to North Central Massachusetts.

For example, one of the earliest artworks to come into FAM's collection is a **Tapa Cloth** from the Island of Tonga in the South Pacific. Tapa cloths were made from tree bark, and dyed with decorative patterns, and were used for a variety of sacred and secular purposes. FAM's **Tapa Cloth** was gifted to the museum in 1931 by Miss Cora Hatch of Fitchburg. One of the Museum's more recent acquisitions is a **Spirit Mask** from Baining, New Britain, Papua New Guinea. This mask, an embodiment of forest spirits used in a fire-lit nighttime dance ritual, traveled a more complicated route. It passed through the hands of dealers to Mrs. Helen Schlosberg, a member of a philanthropic New England shoe manufacturing family. Mrs. Schlosberg gifted her collection to the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis where the **Spirit Mask** was exhibited in 1977. The Rose then transferred its Oceanic Art collection to the Worcester Art Museum (WAM) in 2004. In 2017, WAM de-accessioned this piece, and offered it to FAM. Other objects were purchased from galleries, or acquired directly from living artists.



**Moving Objects** also celebrates the many individuals and organizations who have directly gifted works of art to our collection. Foremost among these donors are Dwight and Anna Cooper Heath, the Geneviève MacMillan-Reba Stewart Foundation, William Teel, and the Hamill Gallery of African Art. Together, these collectors have created here at FAM one of New England's most impressive collections of African and Oceanic Art.

**Moving Objects** is organized by FAM's Consulting Curator of African, Oceanic, and Native American Art, Jean Borgatti. This exhibition has been funded by a generous grant from the Geneviève MacMillan-Reba Stewart Foundation.

### About FAM

The Fitchburg Art Museum serves the cities of Fitchburg and Leominster and the surrounding communities in North Central Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire. FAM was founded in 1925, and its five-building complex, with over 20,000 square feet of exhibition space, features exhibitions from its art historical collections as well as special exhibitions focused on New England contemporary art. FAM plays a vital role in the cultural life of the region and the Museum maintains active educational partnerships with the local school systems, as well as Fitchburg State University. FAM is an engine for creativity, education, community building and fun!

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