

PREVIEW
ART MARKET



THE ART MARKET

Murray Frum's significant collection of Oceanic art goes under the hammer in Paris, and Asian Art Week comes to New York. June saw wildly fluctuating results in London as Christie's staged its least successful evening sale in recent times. **Susan Moore**

MARKET PREVIEW

While the much-heralded Biennale des Antiquaires opens its doors in the Grand Palais from 11 to 21 September (previewed on pp. 50–52), the galleries around Saint-Germain-des-Prés play host to the rather more low key but no less enjoyable *Parcours des Mondes* (9–14 September). The Paris salerooms, meanwhile, offer auctions and exhibitions appealing to those visiting both events.

On 16 September, Sotheby's presents the most important selection of Oceanic art to appear on the market in 30 years: the Frum collection. Revealingly, the late Murray Frum, a Canadian property developer and serious connoisseur-collector of the old school, gave part of his renowned African tribal holdings – magnificent pieces from Cameroon – to the Art Gallery of Ontario rather than the Royal Ontario Museum because he considered them first and foremost works of art rather than ethnography. That belief, however, did not quell his curiosity about these objects or his desire to understand their contexts. This group, comprising some 70 pieces from the island nations of the Pacific and representing all levels of the market, has at its core a group of unique pre-contact Polynesian pieces. They are as striking for their powerful sculptural aesthetic as for their historical importance and rarity.

Perhaps most remarkable is the large – 39cm high – free-standing, three-dimensional Maori figure with a mass of human hair, known as a *pou whakairo* (Fig. 1). It belongs to a group of just six comparable carved figures, which may represent deified ancestors rather than gods. This particularly imposing and potent example, only discovered in an attic in Scotland in 1979 and apparently acquired by a sea-faring ancestor, is the only one remaining in private hands. In all these figures, the head is given most prominence (for the Maori, the head and especially the hair of a chief is considered *tapu* – that is, imbued with sacred power).

Adorned with what is presumably the ancestor's own hair, this powerful head is detailed not only with elaborate male tattoo patterns but also eyes inlaid with brass – highly prized just after the arrival of the Europeans – and, uniquely, two small brass plaques in the open mouth representing teeth. Two

