

THEACQUISITION

Inti Ligabue on an Ewa power figure

THE VENETIAN BUSINESSMAN AND COLLECTOR, WHO SERVES AS HONORARY PRESIDENT OF THE PARCOURS DES MONDES IN PARIS THIS MONTH, TALKS ABOUT A FAVORITE WORK OF TRIBAL ART AND HIS FATHER'S FASCINATION WITH OUR GLOBAL CULTURAL LEGACY.

AMONG MY FAVORITE PIECES in my collection is a marvelous Ewa statue from New Guinea, which I purchased at Christie's Paris in October 2014. The figure, which is nearly five feet tall and dates to the 19th century (if not earlier), is of an *aripa*, or hunting spirit. It's of a type that would have been placed in a ceremonial cave in the Karawari River area of the Middle Sepik, following the death of its owner. Such figures were thought to empower hunters during their lifetime so they could feed their people; they are also emblematic of the seminal relationship we have with nature and the forces that govern that relationship.

Aside from its commanding presence and its magical properties, the statue also epitomizes in many ways the relationship I had with my father, Giancarlo, who, in addition to running the family catering business, developed an absolute passion for anthropology. He was insatiably curious about the origins of humanity, the trajectory of our evolution, and the diversity of cultural expression around the world. Over the course of his life he undertook more than 130 expeditions, including some to the Asmat area of Papua New Guinea, and supported a host of important academic research institutions. I was lucky enough to accompany him on his last six expeditions, to Easter Island and to the Marquesas. For him, collecting—that is, the collecting of well-provenanced works—provided a medium through which one could learn about the human spirit.

Which brings us back to this particular piece, and a rather personal, perhaps even funny story. When the statue came up for sale at Christie's, I knew I was drawn to it for its size, its excellent condition, and the fact that it had a certain geometric, almost modern quality. As with most things, I was concerned with its provenance. It turns out the piece had an impressive chain of ownership, having been in the collection of Londoner Philip Goldman and, before that, among the holdings of Marcia and John Friede of New York. I also knew it had come up for auction in 1994, but it wasn't until February of last year, a month after my father's death and two months after the piece had arrived at my house in Venice, that I looked it up in the catalog for that sale. My father had an archive of auction catalogs for the areas that interested him, stretching back to the 1970s. He regularly made handwritten notes on the lots he was considering, complete with the prices he paid for those objects he won and the maximum bids he placed on those he lost. When it turned out he had been the underbidder on my Ewa statue in that sale more than two decades ago, I realized then that I had inherited my father's eye for wonderful works of tribal art. ☐



DATEBOOK



A 19th-century Nkisi figure included in "Bakongo" at Galerie Ablat & Alain Lecomte.

PARIS

An Expanding Worldview

Dealers in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés neighborhood bring out their best while hosting out-of-town peers for the 15th edition of the **Parcours des Mondes**, running September 6 through 11. A dozen galleries from the United States and 16 from Belgium are among the 84 presenting their wares at the gathering, which is dedicated to the indigenous arts of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas. Works range from ritual paraphernalia and intricately carved household objects to statuary in bronze, wood, stone, and terra-cotta. —ANGELA M.H. SCHUSTER

5 SHOWS NOT TO MISS

1 "Bakongo" offers a selection of figural fetishes made by the Kongo people, whose traditional territory encompasses much of present-day Republic of Congo and Angola. *Galerie Ablat & Alain Lecomte, 4 Rue des Beaux-Arts*

2 "Tsogho: Icons of the Bwiti" includes a suite of wood, bone, and brass reliquaries of the Tsogho people, forest-dwelling adherents of the Bwiti religion in Gabon and Cameroon. *Galerie Bernard Dulon, 10 Rue Jacques Callot*

3 "Savage Island: The Art of Niue" presents rare painted bark-cloth works and carved wooden

clubs from the tiny Polynesian island visited by James Cook in 1774.

Michael Evans Tribal Art, 16 Rue Guénégaud

4 "Hair" explores ethno-cultural notions of coiffeur as a status marker and hair accessories as an expression of cultural identity through 100 objects produced by tribal societies around the globe and executed in wood, bone, and precious metals. *Yann Ferrandin, 33 Rue de Seine*

5 "Beyond the Mask" exhibits variations on the form from Africa, Oceania, and Indonesia that explore the highly charged relationships among the artist, the mask, and its wearer. *Schoffel de Fabry, 14 Rue Guénégaud*