Selections from the Exhibition

“The Dayaks: Peoples of the Borneo Rainforest”
February 25, 1989, to June 3, 1990

The objects pictured on the following pages have been selected from several hundred pieces that are on display in The University Museum’s exhibition, “The Dayaks: Peoples of the Borneo Rainforest.” This small selection was made, not as a representation of the broad scope of materials in that exhibition, but, rather, to convey a visual sense of the general style and aesthetics of Dayak material culture.

Traditional Dayak material culture can be thought of as being made for a wide range of uses and social contexts that can be scaled from secular and utilitarian at one extreme to highly religious and societal at the other. At the secular and utilitarian end of this activity scale the objects tended to be plain and unadorned, while at the other end the objects were crafted by the most skilled hands and contained find, rare, or singular materials. Thus, aesthetic expression was an integral part of certain contexts, and not a part of others.

I have used the name “Dayak” as though there were only one culture and people living in the interior of Borneo, and that, of course, is not the case. There are many Dayak cultures, and they are not uniform with respect to the production of artistic material culture. Some showed strong expressive qualities, others did not. In other words, there was a noticeable degree of aesthetic specialization among Dayak cultures, just as there was also specialization in nonaesthetic, often purely economic activities. Nevertheless, there is a measure of similarity in the motifs, patterns, and use of forms that gives visual unity to Dayak art, regardless of what specific culture it came from.

b. Doorway from a longhouse; Sebop, Tinjar River, Sarawak. P1301, H. 2.03 m, W. 68.8 cm.
**Swords and seat mats.**

a. Detail of fighting sword hilt of antler and animal hair. P1232. H. 7.0 cm.

b. Fighting sword, sheath, and small knife; group unknown. Barum District, Sarawak. P1232 L. (sword) 68.4 cm, L. (sheath) 52.7 cm, L. (knife) 49.4 cm.

c. Fighting sword, sheath, Kropyak, Barum District, Sarawak. P1234. L. (sheath) 53.1 cm, L. (sword and sheath) 68.3 cm.

d. Seat mat (worn to cover buttocks); rattan with metal decorations; Kayan, Mentaram, Borneon. P190. L. 54.4 cm, W. 39 cm.

e. Seat mat, rattan with ceramic disc; Iban, Barum R., Sarawak. P199. L. 50.4 cm, W. 41.2 cm.

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Fighting clothing.
a. Fighting jacket (front), sun bear skin; Madang (Kayan). Plima R., Sarawak. P1153. H. 1.04 m. W. 55.9 cm.

b. Fighting jacket (back of above), rhinoceros hornbill feathers, headwork.

c. Fighting cap, skin of a wild cat, human hair, and headwork; Kayan, Barum R., Sarawak. P1138. H. (cap only) 22.9 cm. D. 21.6 cm.

d. Fighting cap, pangolin skin and rhinoceros hornbill feathers; group unknown. Plima R., Sarawak. P1133. H. (including feathers) 35.5 cm. D. (front to back) 22.9 cm.

e. Fighting jacket (front), pangolin skin; Iban, Barum R., Sarawak. P1153. H. 78 cm. W. 45.7 cm.
Ritual masks and fighting shields.  

a. Painted ritual mask; Kayan, Mendalam R., Indonesia. Barusak. P1066, H. (of ears) 44.5 cm, W. 33.5 cm.  
b. Ritual mask, natural wood finish; group unknown, Barum District, Sarawak. P766, H. 30.5 cm, W. 33 cm.  
d-e. Painted shield (front, back) with attached human hair; Kayan, Barum R., Sarawak. P1278, H. 1.29 m, W. 38.1 cm.

Canoes.  
a. Drawing of a Kayan canoe model with bow piece (P1084, below) added; Barum District, Sarawak. P1045, L. 93.6 cm, H. 15.3 cm.  
b. Blade of a Kayan woman’s paddle; Barum District, Sarawak. P1074, L. (blade only) 68 cm.  
c. Blade of a Kayan woman’s paddle; Mendalam R., Sarawak. P1073, L. (blade only) 50 cm.  
e. Blade of a Kayan man’s paddle; Mendalam R., Sarawak. P1099, L. (blade only) 63.5 cm.  
f. Carved bow piece; Kayan, Barum District, Sarawak. P1084, L. 44.5 cm, W. 26 cm.  
g. Carved cleat; Kayan, Barum River, Sarawak. P1053, L. 47.7 cm, W. 13.3 cm.
Blowgun and poison darts. a. Drawing of a Kayan blowgun with spear blade; Mendalam R., Indonesian Borneo. P1102a. L. 2.0 m, D. 2.4 cm (at blowing end). Drawing by Benson Huang. b. Bamboo case with poison darts, lid, and belt hook; Kayan, Sarawak. P1173. H. 33.0 cm (without top). D. 19.7 cm. c. Poisoned blowgun darts; Bukitum (Penan), Rejang R., Sarawak. P1212, P1218. L. 24.7 cm to 36.9 cm. d,e. Palette and spreader for mixing poison and applying to dart points; Bukitum (Penan), Rejang R., Sarawak. P1216c (palette), L. 28.3 cm, P1216c (spreader), L. 28 cm.

Backpacks and household objects. a. Rattan backpack; Melanau, Baram R., Sarawak. P1957, H. 35.5 cm, D. (at top) 31.7 cm. b. Beaded backpack; Selopo, Baram R., Sarawak. P654, H. 48.5 cm, D. (max.) 30.5 cm. c. Dippers for rice wine; top: bamboo, bottom: belian wood; Kenyah, Baram District, Sarawak. P606c (top), L. 34 cm, P303b, L. 32.5 cm. d. Decorated bamboo cups; Berawan (Kenyah), Teljar R., Sarawak. L. to r.: P365a, H. 22.2 cm, D. 8.3 cm, P367a, H. 21.5 cm, D. 8.3 cm. P390, H. 21.5 cm, D. 5.8 cm. e. Gourd bottle and stopper; collected from the Kayan, Mendalam R., Indonesian Borneo, possibly a trade object. P276, H. 35.5 cm, D. (max.) 17.8 cm. f. Ceramic cooking pot with rattan holder and suspension hook; Kayan, Baram District, Sarawak. P390, H. 30.3 cm, D. (max.) 15.2 cm.
Cloth and personal ornaments.  

a. Detail of ikat ceremonial cloth (pua); Iban or Kantu'. P603a.  
b. Detail of ikat jacket; Iban, Sarawak. P143.  
c. Detail of ikat jacket; Iban, Saribus R., Sarawak. P145.  
d. Detail of ikat skirt; Kantu', Kapuas R., Indonesian Borneo. P176.  
e. End panel of a loincloth, supplementary weft technique; Kantu', Kapuas R., Indonesian Borneo. P163.  
g. Woman's wood ear pendant; Kenyah, Baram District, Sarawak. P29a, L. 17.7 cm, D. 5.4 cm.  
h. Pair of woman's wood ear ornaments; Tunjung, Mahakam R., Indonesian Borneo. P40a, L. 5 cm, D. 2.5 cm.  
i. Pair of man's hornbill ivory ear ornaments; Kelabit (Murut), Baram R., Sarawak. P35, L. 7.6 cm.  
j. Pair of man's brass ear ornaments, Kantu', Kapuas R., Indonesian Borneo. P23, L. 15.3 cm.