



Vanuatu Monumental Ritual Exchange Mat

An exceptionally fine and large mat or sese (a large blanket type mat) used as a ritual exchange item during a wedding, marriage or death; and the sese is often used as well as a wrap for the deceased. The design is carved using the “reserve” technique and shows a variation on the archaic motif of the “Bird of the High Seas” (Lewawan). The significance of this design is now totally forgotten by even the oldest generations. Sese mats are usually about three metres in length. The design is carved on the outer layers of the mat, which will be placed over the rolled mat before being dyed. The long sides of the mat are fringed with a woven, open-work motif with twin knotted tassels in their center. This is one of the largest

Pentecost Island, Vanuatu, Melanesia. Pandanus fiber (*Pandanus tectorius*) and dye made from the inner bark (local name : butsu laba). 400 x 85 cm w/o fringes. 19/20th century.

Provenance:

Field collected in the mid 20th century by a visiting French academic.

Literature:

Bonnemaison, Joel; Kaufmann, Christian; Huffman, Kirk; Darrell, Tyron (ed.) : VANUATU OCEANIE. Art Reunion des Musee Nationaux, Paris, 1996, pages 104 to 115.

Speiser, Felix : ETHNOLOGY OF VANUATU, AN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY STUDY. English translation, Crawford-House Press, Bathurst, 1991, Plate 75 for an identical mat with a variation

An identical example is the Honolulu Museum of Art, Hawaii :

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Red_mat_from_Pentecost_Island,_Vanuatu,_Honolulu_Museum