



Iban Art: Sexual Selection and Severed Heads

Michael Heppell, Limbang Anak Melak, Enian Anak Usen

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The author describes the ikat, sungkit, pilih, and other forms of Iban weaving, the sculptures, the tattooing, metal forging, and other art of the Iban in the context of their oral sagas, stories, poetry, and love songs. He shows how art was used as a pre-literate scholastic aptitude test to ensure intelligent Iban married other intelligent Iban to increase the likelihood that their children were intelligent and were more likely to prosper. Women also chose men on the basis of their prowess at war to ensure the household, physically, was secure. That meant heads and headhunting. The book shows how weaving and headhunting came to be ritualized, the one encouraging the other, so that sexual selection was bound into the Iban's holy trinity of taking heads, growing rice, and birth or regeneration.

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