



# Messages in Stone: Statues and Sculptures from Tribal Indonesia

*Barbier-Mueller Museum*

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The Southeast Asian archipelago includes numerous islands that are strewn with stone monuments and statues. Some of these carvings date back to an ancient past that is almost impossible to calculate. Others are but a few decades old.

A number of these sculptures reach such an impressive size that they might almost rival the well-known giant carvings of Easter Island. Yet the surprising stone works of Island Southeast Asia remain relatively unknown to the general public and connoisseurs alike.

For reasons that are hard to explain, Western museums have long overlooked this form of "primitive art." Only in the past few years has the situation changed as a few important institutions in Germany, Belgium and the United States added a Batak rider statue or a large ritual seat from Nias to their collections.

For nearly a quarter of a century the Barbier-Mueller Museum has striven to assemble a coherent collection of these monolithic monuments. It is worth recalling that this museum put together in 1981, under the auspices of the Indonesian government, the "Art of Archaic Indonesia" show which was mounted in Geneva, Brooklyn and Dallas. Although other events have since enabled art lovers to learn more about the archipelago's stone sculptures, never has a single exhibition been devoted entirely to this art-- until today. Happily, that shortcoming is a thing of the past.

Since its foundation twenty-one years ago, the Barbier-Mueller Museum of Primitive Art has earned for itself an international renown thanks to the exhibition catalogues and art books that the museum has published focusing on certain parts of its collection.

Numerous traveling exhibitions have been organized in collaboration with several major museums, including the Los Angeles County Museum, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Asia Society of New York, the Rotterdam Museum or the National Museum of Taiwan.

The Barbier-Mueller Museum is a private non-profit institution that aims to conserve, study and publish a family art collection that first took shape during World War I and which an abiding acquisitions policy has continued to enrich. This growing collection now contains some 5,500 sculptures, fabrics, ornaments and pieces of jewelry from Oceania, Africa, the Americas and Southeast Asia. The public is periodically invited to discover the many facets of this collection, while long-term loans to other museums are regularly arranged.

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