



TRIBAL PACIFICA

ABN 84 083 168 950

art from the land we belong...

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Artist Profile:

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I come from Mussau Island, the largest island in the St. Mathias Group Northwest of New Ireland Province in Papua New Guinea. Unlike many areas of Papua New Guinea today; Mussau Island does not have any forms of traditional art that it can identify with. This group of islands had lost all its tribal arts, crafts, dances, songs and artefacts even part of its cultural heritage in 1930 when the people took the giant steps towards western and foreign ideologies and beliefs. Those people who made the decision to accept these changes did not suspect the dangers involve. In the throwing away part of their traditional life, they become people with no traditional history except the record of baptism into the new faiths and religions. These experiences have presented to us, the children of this generation very personal feelings of emptiness, loss of pride, lack of artistic knowledge and skills, and identity. Because of these limitations that we have, I have decided to record the oral history through my paintings.

I had to start somewhere so I looked at a culture – the Malagan Culture of tarbar and the central New Ireland. These places are not far from my island about 2 day's sea journey by the small coastal vessels. What fascinated and urged me to study and paint this culture are their simple beliefs in super natural beings (spirits) and their behaviours. The New Irelanders are among some of the friendliest, loveliest and most beautiful people in PNG. They live very happy and simple life. They are honest about their interactions with others regardless of whether they are strangers or family members. I really admire these people and always want to know what makes them better persons.

I soon found out that it was their Malagan beliefs that enable each member of the community to behave and conduct themselves appropriately on different occasions and in the presence of different people. Young adults had to pass through initiations under the watchful eyes of their elders before performing their expected roles in their communities. Chores in families and communities are shared by all. Babies and children never get lonely or left out. Everyone including very old people is well cared for. Most communities do not have retarded or mentally-ill people. The Malagan culture is a well structured cultured because of the following things:

- a) It believes that there are three gods who form the godhead.
1. The bird representing the god who governs the air
 2. The snake (black & white) representing the god of the land
 3. The fish god governs the sea is represented by the fish.

The prominent features of the Malagan mask are the eyes. The culture teaches that the gods sees everything each member of the community does. Whenever interacting with other people, their words and actions must be done honestly and peacefully.

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I see myself as a contemporary PNG Artist doing something to record the tribal beliefs and histories of some PNG cultures. The Malagan Series are done to record the different aspects of the Malagan culture.

1. Tumbuang – female mask collecting taro and fish for the initiation camp.

This symbolizes - The gods that the Malagan communities worship is the provider of their daily needs.

2. Male Initiation – guided by the Male duk duk

This is a formal school in the Malagan society that all young men should attend. Young ladies are trained at home as home-markers under the wisdoms of the wise old ladies.

3. Malagan Transformation

The Malagan culture believes that a person can become transformed when they accept the beliefs and pass through the Malagan ritual. Therefore they should behave accordingly to the norms of the Malagan culture. You have a lot of freedom but must be guided by the Malagan culture.

4. Community Celebration – once a year.

After the young men pass through their Malagan initiation rituals, they become men and are able to perform the roles of men. They are eligible for marriage and to start up a home and new life. They are still part of the Malagan community. The whole Malagan society celebrates their accomplishments and success. These men have learned everything during their initiation period – things such as building houses, garden fences, making fishing nets and spears, fishing trap, paddle, canoes and how to read the currents of the oceans and the stars in the sky to navigate and look for signs for a big catch.

This Malagan festival is celebrated by all communities and it signifies the foundation of the society.

With my other paintings, I am trying to depict the happiness and freedom that people enjoyed in their rural communities outside of urban centres. I used the vibrant colours to express that feeling of happiness.