

PLUMES AND PEARLSHELLS

ART OF THE
NEW GUINEA
HIGHLANDS

CHILDREN'S TRAIL

HAVE FUN EXPLORING & MAKE SOME ART OF YOUR OWN

Collect
a pencil



Go on a journey
through the
exhibition



Discover
the artworks



PLUMES AND PEARLSHELLS

ART OF THE
NEW GUINEA HIGHLANDS

Image: Wahgi men adorned with pearlshell necklaces and nose ornaments, and parrot and bird of paradise feather headdresses (detail). Photo: Stan Moriarty

Education partner



STATE STREET.

This exhibition presents body art, weapons and sacred objects from the New Guinea highlands. Natural materials are used in creative and meaningful ways in all these works, showing the artists' great respect and understanding for the environment.

Generously supported by



GORDON DARLING FOUNDATION

★ **Find** this spirit figure.

This spirit figure would have been worn on the heads of male dancers in a special ceremony that asked powerful spirits to help nature grow.

Imagine what it would be like to dance with such a large sculpture on your head. Would you have to hold it to keep it from wobbling?

Spot the woven fibres and colours. What animal shape does it remind you of? Do you have a favourite animal?

Design your own animal-shaped spirit figure sculpture.



Wiru people, Pangia, Ialibu-Pangia District, Southern Highlands Province, Timbu wara (ritual spirit figure) mid 1900s, 133 x 86 x 8.5 cm

At home make a cardboard sculpture of your animal-shaped spirit figure and decorate it with patterns and colour.



★ **Meet** this *yupini*.

This *yupini* is a woven figure that has been decorated with necklaces and a hat. It would have been held and made to dance in a special ceremony where boys learnt about sacred rituals.

Notice the small shells, feathers and seeds that have been used to decorate it. Can you spot the echidna skull that has been made into a necklace?

Look at the expression of the *yupini*.

Imagine he could come to life and talk to you. **Describe** what you think he would be like?

Invent a story about this *yupini* dancing and draw or write it here.



Kandepe-Enga people, Kandepe, Enga Province, Yupini (fertility figure) mid 1900s, 121.5 x 49 x 27 cm

At home find out more about the highlands of New Guinea and how the people dress for special ceremonies.



★ **Find** this large pearlshell.

A pearlshell or *kin* is from the lining of a large oyster shell. This shell has been cut into a u-shape, polished and set into a wooden mount.

Pearlshells like this can be worn around the neck or used in exchange ceremonies to celebrate special events.

Imagine wearing it round your neck. How heavy do you think it would be?

Find the special decorated wallet nearby that would have been used to carry and protect the shell. What is it made from?

Draw your own decorative wallet design here.



At home find out more about oysters, their mother-of-pearl shell lining and how they make pearls.



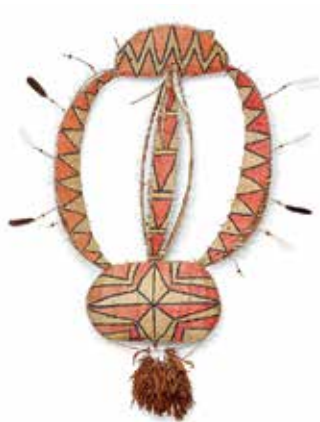
★ **Look** at this huge dance banner.

This dance banner would have been attached to the shoulders of a dancer. It is made of bark cloth stretched over a bamboo frame.

Notice the feathers and seed pods that decorate it. They would have bounced and rattled as the dancer moved.

The patterns are inspired by the dreams of the dancers and it is thought that this banner shows a spider with droplets of dew caught in its web. Do you think the feathers are the dew?

Design your own pattern for a dance banner.



Alekano people, Nuppha and Kaveve villages, Benabena Valley, Eastern Highlands Province, Gaiheisi (ceremonial dance banner) c1968, 238.8 x 121.9 x 55 cm

At home write down what you dream about over a few nights and make designs and patterns based on your dreams.



★ **Find** this feathery figure.

Thousands of cassowary bird feathers have been used to decorate this special mask.

The mask covered the whole body of its wearer. Where do you think they would look through?

Spot the pig tusks that have been used to decorate the nose. What other things from nature can you see on this mask?

Draw a picture of your own full-body mask decorated with things from nature.



Tairora people, Kairantuu District, Eastern Highlands Province, Mask for initiation ceremonies mid 1900s, figure 183 x 79 x 75 cm

At home collect things from nature and attach them together to make a costume or mask.



★ **Find** this mud mask.

This mask is made from mud that has been caked onto a cane frame then dried out.

Large groups of men known as the Asaro mudmen wear these masks and cover their bodies in mud to perform and dance in a special show each year.

Imagine you are visiting the highlands to see the mudmen perform in a show and write a postcard to a friend to tell them about it.

Stamp: First Day Cover, Goroka Show 1964, Territories of Papua & New Guinea, private collection (detail)



At home find out about the Asaro mudmen and the Goroka and Mount Hagen shows.



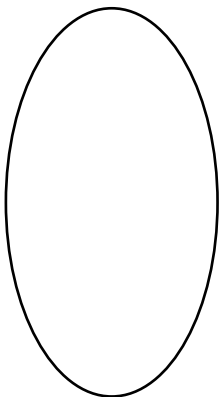
★ **Locate** this shield and arrows.

This shield and net bag for carrying arrows is an example of *bilum*-making, which is like knitting.

Role-play how the weaver would have to move their hands to twist the fibres together.

Look at the other examples of shields and arrows in this exhibition. Which one do you like best?

Design your own pattern for this shield and add arrows behind it.



Baruya people, Wonenara, Eastern Highlands Province, *Gilimthya* (shield and arrows with net bag) mid 1900s, 89.5 x 43 x 1.5 cm; 115 x 43 x 5 cm overall, including arrows

At home wrap and knot twine and string together to make your own looped artwork. Decorate it with things from nature.



★ **Look** at this feathered headdress.

Highlanders like to decorate themselves as works of art – they paint patterns on their faces and use careful selections of feathers, shells and leaves to make body decorations. This art form is called *bilas*.

Look at the detail on this headdress. How many different types of bird feathers can you see?

Look at other examples of body decoration.

Design your own special headdress on this shape using ideas from the ones in the exhibition.



At home cut card to make a headdress shape then add paper, card and found objects to decorate it. Think about what colours you will use and how you will arrange everything.



★ **Find** this shell necklace.

This shell necklace is another example of body decoration.

Find and count the following things on the necklace:

- large oyster shells
- small cowrie shells
- pig tusks
- red seeds

Is the necklace symmetrical (the same on each side)?

Imagine how this necklace would look if it was made from machine-made parts rather than from nature.

Create your own necklace design using machine-made shapes. Will you make it symmetrical?



At home make your own necklace out of found and recycled objects.



★ **Meet** this festive figure.

This figure is made from many different materials. It is wearing the traditional body decorations of the people who created it and would have been carried in a ceremony or festival.

Decorate this figure using ideas from the objects you see in the exhibition or invent your own.



At home think about all of the body decorations and objects you have seen in this exhibition and create your own designs for a man or woman to wear. Draw your ideas.