

Finch & C^o



OCEANIC MARSHALL ISLANDS CHIEF'S WOVEN PANDANUS LEAF FIBRE AND BLACK DYED HIBISCUS BAST BELT

A RARE OCEANIC MARSHALL ISLANDS CHIEF'S WOVEN PANDANUS LEAF FIBRE AND BLACK DYED HIBISCUS BAST BELT OF
ABSTRACT DESIGN

19TH CENTURY

SIZE: 34CM HIGH, 29CM WIDE, 5.5CM DEEP - 13½ INS HIGH, 11½ INS WIDE, 2¼ INS DEEP

LITERATURE

THE SUPERB DESIGNS AND CONSUMMATE SKILL OF THE MARSHALLESE WOMEN FIBRE ARTISTS IS EVIDENT IN ARTICLES SUCH AS THIS RARE BELT. MADE FROM UN-DYED TAN COLOURED PANDANUS LEAVES AND HIBISCUS BAST DYED BLACK, THE FIBRES ARE PRECISELY INTERWOVEN TO CREATE A COMPLEX ABSTRACT DESIGN. THE WOMEN WORE SKIRTS FORMED FROM TWO DRESS MATS, ONE AT THE BACK AND ONE AT THE FRONT, HANGING FULL LENGTH TO THE ANKLES AND WRAPPED AROUND THE HIPS OVER THE FRONT MAT TO ALLOW THE RICHLY PATTERNED BORDERS TO BE SEEN. MEN WORE A SINGLE MAT AT THE WAIST TUCKED INTO A BELT AT THE FRONT, PASSED BETWEEN THE LEGS AND TUCKED INTO THE BELT AGAIN AT THE BACK TO FORM A LOINCLOTH. THESE BELTS WERE PLAINER. IT WAS ON IMPORTANT CEREMONIAL OCCASIONS THAT CHIEFS AND OTHER HIGH RANKING MEN WORE A SINGLE MAT FULL LENGTH AT THE FRONT LIKE AN APRON OVER A VOLUMINOUS FIBRE SKIRT SECURED WITH AN ORNATELY PLAITED FIBRE BELT SUCH AS THIS EXAMPLE.

MADE EXCLUSIVELY BY WOMEN, THE ORNAMENTAL BLACK DYED HIBISCUS BAST DESIGNS WERE SEWN USING DELICATE NEEDLES MADE FROM BIRD OR FISH BONE. THE COMPLEX GEOMETRIC PATTERNS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN PURELY DECORATIVE. ALTHOUGH THE BELTS AND MATS TOOK A CONSIDERABLE TIME TO PRODUCE THEY WERE INTENDED FOR CONSTANT USE, AND WHEN PROPERLY CARED FOR COULD BE WORN FOR ABOUT A YEAR. THEY ARE A TESTIMONY TO THE ABILITY OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDERS TO CREATE STRIKING WORKS OF ART FROM THE MOST BASIC MATERIALS.